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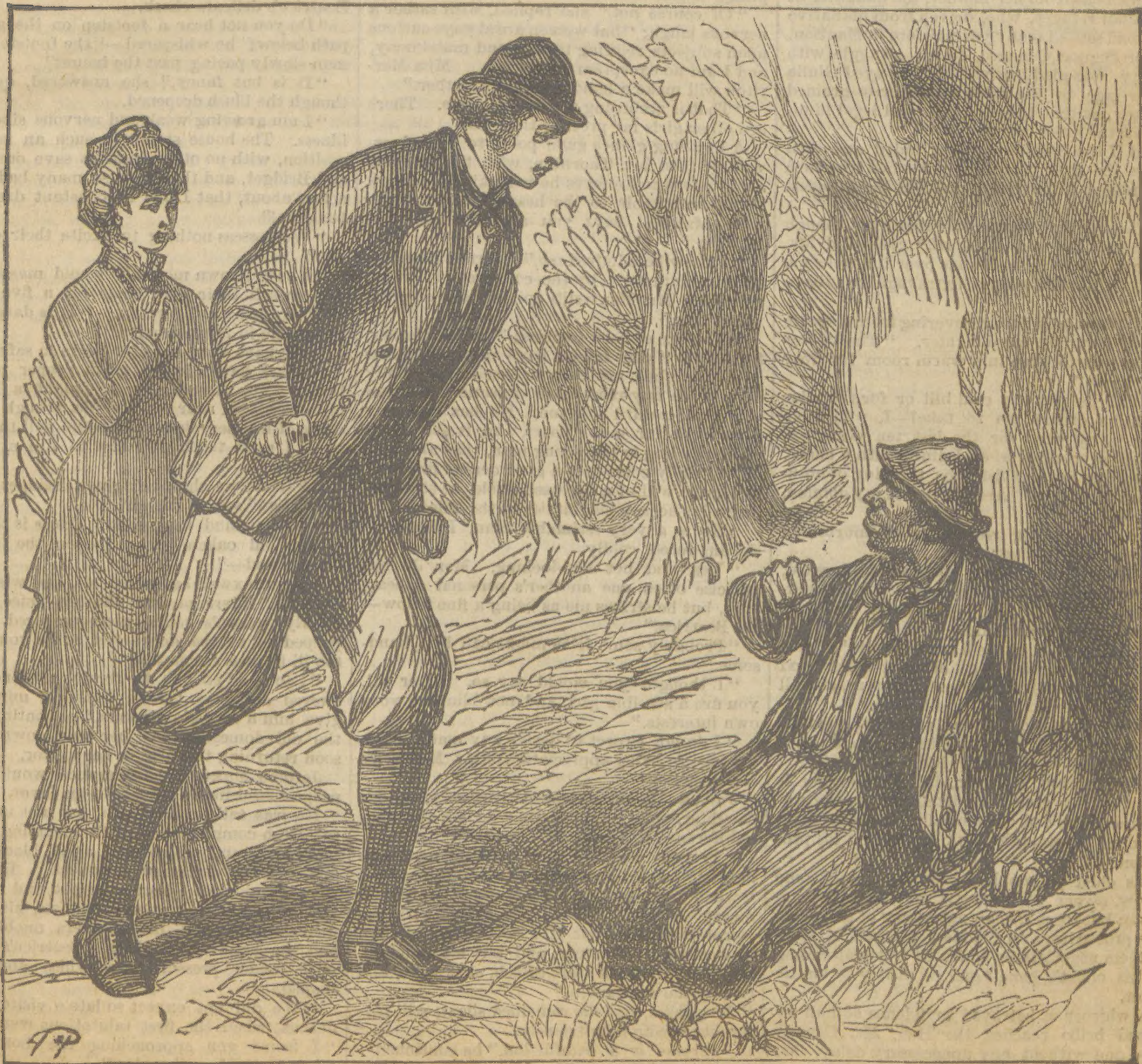
October 2, 1883.

No 203. VOL. VIII. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N. Y. PRICE, 5 CENTS

PASSION'S REPRISAL; OR, THE BARGAIN BETWEEN THEM.

BY LILLIAN LOVEJOY,

AUTHOR OF "SINNED AGAINST," "HONOR BOUND," "A STRANGE MARRIAGE," ETC., ETC.



"I SOON CAUSED THE FELLOW TO MEASURE HIS LENGTH ON THE GROUND."

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The Bargain Between Them.

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CHAPTER I.

AN UNWELCOME SUITOR.

A SPACIOUS, plainly-furnished room, with heavy old-fashioned furniture, faded crimson curtains, closely drawn because the evening was chilly although the season was spring, and a bright fire burning on the hearth, beside which were seated an elderly man, pale, emaciated, evidently an invalid, and a beautiful girl of eighteen, his only daughter.

Perhaps no greater contrasts in appearance ever held so near a relationship as Joshua Thornton and the fair Beatrice. He, small and awkward in figure, sharp-featured, red-haired, with prominent blue eyes glancing quickly from under his scant eyelashes; she, tall and finely molded, with brown hair artistically coiled round her well-shaped head, and dreamy, dark orbs capable of flashing with pleasure, enthusiasm, or even anger, according to the mood of the moment.

Beatrice inherited her beauty and impulsive temperament from her mother, the daughter of an Italian refugee, who, driven from his native land, had settled many years before in Madison.

Poor Signor Cannaro, in his struggle with poverty, was glad to give his black eyed Giulia in marriage to the ill-favored, cross-grained attorney, at that time the principal legal luminary of the quiet country town.

And if the Southern flower faded and died within the first year of her wedded life, such misfortunes will occur to dissolve the happiest unions.

"The evenings seem colder than ever, though it is nearly the end of April," grumbled Mr. Thornton, holding his hands over the welcome blaze. "Yet it is wanton extravagance to have a fire."

"You are only just recovering from a severe illness," returned his daughter. "The doctor advises you to keep in a warm room for fear of a relapse."

"Will he pay the coal bill or for the wine which he orders me to take?—I, who have never tasted wine for the last ten years, excepting of course when I dined with a client. But doctors are a selfish race, thinking of nothing but their fees. Are you not of my opinion, Beatrice?"

The girl, bending over her work, murmured a careless affirmative.

"How dull and listless you are!" he pursued, in the same complaining tone. "My clerk, Jerome Maxwell, has my interest at heart more than my own child."

"I am so tired of these sordid cares," sighed Beatrice. "Besides, I could never understand why poverty stole so suddenly upon us, and all your best clients fell away altogether."

"The chances of fortune, my dear; just the persistent ill-luck that sometimes defeats all a man's efforts to succeed in life."

Mr. Thornton, however, did not consider it expedient to give full details of the circumstances which had occasioned his descent from the once respectable rank he held in his profession.

His chief patron had been the Hon. Claude Carew, owner of Fairview and its adjoining estate; but there was an ugly story of discreditable proceedings on the lawyer's part in some business negotiations which he was transacting on his client's behalf and ostensibly in his interest.

A whisper of betrayed confidence and an accepted bribe reached the Hon. Mr. Carew's ears, and without any unnecessary delay, that wrathful gentleman transferred the manage-

ment of his legal affairs to a firm in a different portion of the town.

From that hour Joshua's fortune steadily declined. Though no specific charge had been made against him, people would not employ a man upon whom suspicion affixed a brand. Henceforth his professional duties led him into a sphere tainted by crime, and among clients anxious to engage the services of a lawyer not over-troubled with conscientious scruples.

There was a short silence after the last remark, then Beatrice said, with another sigh: "I wish I were an heiress like Miss Merriton. She rides past sometimes on her bay mare, looking so bright and happy."

"The girl is well enough; and if she were as ugly as sin, I should still say he is a lucky fellow who wins her. Old Merriton is a millionaire, and she will inherit his wealth."

"No doubt he expects her to marry a fortune, but there is many a poor man who would gladly lay his heart at her feet, for she is beautiful and accomplished in addition to her wealth."

"They say Claude Carew is looking after her as a suitable wife for his eldest son; but I doubt whether there is truth in the report."

"Tell me what you have heard!" cried Beatrice, eagerly, fixing her bright eyes upon her father; "not in that vague manner, but word for word!"

"Why, bless me, how interested you have grown concerning the Carews and Merritons!" said Mr. Thornton. "Let them marry as they please, it can make no difference to us."

"Of course not," she replied, with rather a nervous laugh; "but women are always curious upon subjects relating to love and matrimony, and I am no exception to the rule. Miss Merriton will make a handsome bride, father."

"That is according to people's taste. There are other girls far prettier than she."

A knowing glance gave point to the observation; then Mr. Thornton, with the satisfied air of one who believes he is making a remark highly acceptable to the hearer, added, "Jerome Maxwell says you are the beauty of Madison."

"I knew he admired me," returned Beatrice, quite unimpressed by the compliment; "but, unluckily, Mr. Maxwell's opinion is of no great value."

"You are so hard to please," said her father, fretfully; "you might have married before now if you had not been so fanciful. I really do not see any reasonable objection you can entertain toward Jerome. He has been my head clerk for many years, and it shows excellent feeling in the young man, that although he has lately come into a good deal of property under the will of a deceased uncle, he still performs his accustomed duties in the office."

"He is a very estimable man, I believe," she answered, coldly.

"Yes, and not bad-looking. Men do not criticise often one another's personal appearance, but he strikes me as being a fine fellow—eh, Beatrice?"

"Probably some folks might call him handsome."

"I thought you would say so. After all, you are a sensible girl, and not blind to your own interests."

"I do not expect to derive any material advantage from my appreciation of Mr. Maxwell's endowments."

Joshua Thornton looked earnestly at his daughter, vainly trying to read whether her indifference was assumed or real.

"Perhaps you will not treat the matter so lightly," he said at length, in some displeasure, "when you hear that I am anxious you should marry Jerome. Things are going with me worse than ever, but if I could persuade him to become my partner, and put his money in the firm, we might start afresh, as it were, and extend the connection."

He paused, but she remained silent, still plying her needle industriously.

"Jerome is a careful lad," he continued—"a thorough man of business. It is doubtful

if I could persuade him to risk his recently acquired inheritance without your influence. He admires you greatly; I think he loves you, or would, if he saw a chance of winning reciprocal regard. Give him encouragement, Beatrice; he would make you a good husband, and the marriage would bind together our interests."

"But I do not love him, father."

"Marry him first, and love him afterward; that is the proper course of procedure for a modest young woman to adopt. I have no patience with the mawkish sentimentality of a school-girl who fancies her heart is irrevocably given to the first fool that pays her a compliment."

"I have not the slightest intention of marrying at present," observed Beatrice, in a tone of decision.

"Grant me patience with this self-willed girl!" exclaimed Mr. Thornton, twisting his fingers in his thin hair, as if intending to pull it out by the roots. "When I tell her she might render me a service, and settle herself advantageously in life by becoming the wife of a sensible, agreeable, good-looking young man, she refuses with as little hesitation as if such chances were met with every hour in the day."

After thus apostrophizing an invisible audience, Joshua flung himself back in his chair, meditating on the rebellious conduct of daughters in general, and his own in particular.

Suddenly he started into an upright position, and seemed to listen intently.

At the same instant a slight flush arose upon Beatrice's delicate cheek.

"Do you not hear a footstep on the gravel path below?" he whispered—"the footstep of a man slowly pacing past the house?"

"It is but fancy," she answered, quietly, though the blush deepened.

"I am growing weak and nervous since my illness. The house stands in such an isolated position, with no other inmates save ourselves and Bridget, and there are so many bad characters about, that I live in constant dread of burglars!"

"We possess nothing to excite their cupidity."

"I have known men who would massacre a city or sell their own souls for a five-dollar bill," argued Mr. Thornton. "It is dangerous to indulge in false security."

"We have lived here for years in safety."

"But I have always taken proper precautions. For instance, every night a loaded pistol is placed near my bedside, though now I doubt if my nerveless hand could pull the trigger. I must teach you how to fire a pistol, Beatrice."

"Father, we should frighten Bridget out of her senses," smiled the girl.

"Never mind that, child. Here is the key of the old oaken bureau; open the second drawer and—"

"Mr. Maxwell has called, sir, and wishes to see you," interrupted a pleasant voice, as an elderly woman's round, good-tempered visage peeped in at the door—"if so be you're not too ill to receive company."

"I am well enough to receive a friend," answered Joshua. "And, Beatrice, mind you give him a cordial welcome," he continued, as the old domestic took her way down-stairs, soon returning to usher in her visitor.

Jerome Maxwell's appearance would have prepossessed many persons in his favor.

He was tall, stoutly built, but not ungraceful, fresh-complexioned, with gleaming white teeth constantly displayed, sleek black hair, and carefully-trimmed mustache. His eyes were of a reddish-brown, bright and restless. He dressed with gentlemanly taste, his movements were quiet, his manners unobtrusive, and the hand which clasped Beatrice's fingers with tender pressure was white and well-shaped.

"We did not expect so late a visitor," said Joshua, when the first salutations were over. "I heard you approaching the house, and mistook you for a burglar."

"Young Barton drove me here in his dog-cart," returned Jerome, lightly; "it was on his way home. We came up the lane, and as Bridget happened to be standing at the back entrance she let me in that way. So I did not startle you, Mr. Thornton."

"Well, anyway, you are welcome. I like to hear the day's news, and it cheers my little girl to see a friendly face after enduring all day the society of her peevish old father."

"I should indeed be happy if my company afforded Miss Beatrice pleasure," said the young man, with an ardent glance at the beautiful girl, who neither flushed nor paled beneath his gaze; "but I fear you overrate my influence."

He seated himself nearly opposite the object of his admiration, whose countenance he scanned as if seeking some token that his presence was more than tolerated; while Joshua, though not generally famed for hospitality, pressed him to partake of some refreshment.

Jerome declined.

"No, thanks. I dined late to-day, and now want a little private conversation with you and Miss Beatrice."

No one could have guessed from her calm exterior how quickly her heart was beating as he significantly uttered these words.

"Why should I attempt to conceal the reason of my visit?" he continued after a moment's pause. "There is nothing like honesty and candor among friends. Do you not think, Mr. Thornton, that if an honorable man intends becoming a lady's suitor, he should be equally anxious to obtain the approval of her lawful guardian as well as that of the lady herself?"

"Certainly; nothing could show higher principle," agreed his friend.

"Then, Mr. Thornton, I solicit your permission to tell your daughter of the love with which she has inspired me."

"That permission is gladly given."

"Thanks; I had ventured to reckon upon your approbation. And now, Miss Thornton—Beatrice, will you accept the hand and heart I offer?"

"I do not admire your fashion of wooing before witnesses," she replied, her lips curling rather scornfully. "However, I am grateful for the honor you do me, and—"

"She accepts your proposal," broke in Joshua, fearing a rejection. "Henceforth we are one family, to sink or swim together. You understand me, Maxwell?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Thornton." And Beatrice, noticing the look of intelligence exchanged between the two, felt that the matter had been previously discussed more freely than her father had led her to suppose. "On the day when this dear girl becomes my wife," he continued enthusiastically, "you and I will enter into another kind of partnership, and the wedding guests who drink the health of bride and bridegroom shall do honor to the toast of 'Success to the firm of Thornton and Maxwell.'"

"But you are mistaken," cried Beatrice, summoning up her courage, though her father's fiery glance sought to awe her into silence. "I have not given my consent."

"But you will, dearest, when I tell you that all my hopes are centered in our union."

"It cannot be," she murmured. "Pray urge me no more."

"Perhaps Miss Thornton has set her affections on another," observed Jerome, with a gloomy brow. "In that case, I have no chance of success."

"Nonsense, man; you are faint-hearted," returned the father. "It is my whim to lead a secluded life and see little or no society. Beatrice, like a dutiful daughter, stays at home, and has no opportunity of forming attachments. You need fear no rival, Maxwell."

"Is that so?" cried Jerome, his brown eyes seeming to emit sparks of fire. "Are your affections unwon?"

She bowed her head in acquiescence, not trusting her lips to speak.

"Then let me hope that in time you will regard my pretensions with more favor. It

shall be my triumph to overcome this calm indifference, and win you for my own."

"From this hour I regard Beatrice as your affianced wife!" whispered Joshua Thornton, encouragingly.

CHAPTER II.

A CLANDESTINE MEETING.

THE gorgeous sunset of a lovely midsummer evening covered the west in vivid tints of crimson and gold, as two young men paced up and down the long terrace fronting the noble pile of buildings belonging to Fairview; both smoking their cigars meditatively, and each seeming to find his own thoughts more interesting than conversation.

Much alike in feature and figure, nearly the same height, and only differing a year in age, Everard and Kenneth Carew were often taken for twin brothers; but though resembling one another in personal appearance, their characters were dissimilar. Everard was thoughtless, impulsive, and extravagant, disliking all serious pursuits, and never looking beyond the pleasure of the hour; while Kenneth was somewhat grave, and, like his father, tenacious of the family honor and proud of the Carew name.

The one passed the greater portion of his time in the stables, where he was on familiar terms with every groom and helper; the other might be described as his father's prime minister, who was consulted on all business connected with the estate, which, however, he was unlikely ever to inherit, as Mr. Carew, with true old English ideas derived from his ancestors, had willed Fairview and all the surrounding property to his oldest son, with the proviso that he should do the same if he had children—if not, it would revert to Kenneth or his heirs.

The silence at length became oppressive to the vivacious heir. He threw away the end of his cigar, yawned repeatedly, and then remarked, "Really, life seems dull and monotonous in this quiet country town, and makes me regret our merry college days, which were too soon over. Do you not find the atmosphere of Fairview more aristocratic than pleasant, Kenneth?"

"I manage to make myself tolerably comfortable," replied his brother; "but, then, I am not so thorough a Bohemian at heart as you are. However, if you were dull, why did you not accompany father to Newark, where the races are held, to-morrow? I know he was vexed at your refusal."

"I had a particular reason for wishing to remain at home. There is a certain fair lady I must see this evening."

"You mean Lilian Merriton?" observed Kenneth, with embarrassment.

"Not I; the millionaire's heiress may be a very pretty girl, but she is not to my taste. I like fire and spirit, not mild insipidity."

"There is nothing insipid about the beauty of Lilian Merriton," returned the other, flushing with anger. "Hers is a pure and delicate loveliness, which steals upon the heart instead of taking it by storm. Her golden hair is like a saint's aureole; her eyes reflect the sweet serenity of the soul within."

Everard burst into a hearty fit of laughter. "How poetical we are! Why, Kenneth, you are evidently deeply smitten."

"There is no shame in loving a woman like Lilian, though I have tried to conquer my affection, believing she was destined one day to be your wife."

"You may feel at ease as regards my rivalry; so go in and win."

"You forget, Everard, that Mr. Merriton is likely to regard every suitor of less wealth than himself in the light of a fortune-hunter; and Lilian herself might misconstrue my motives."

"And think you admired her handsome dowry and great expectations even more than her pretty self, eh, my boy?"

"It might be so; yet I scarcely think that she would so misjudge me."

"A clear case of kindred hearts and secret sympathies," laughed Everard. "Well, Kenneth, rest quite secure that I shall not damage your cause, for, in truth, I am desperately in love with another fair maiden."

"I am glad it is so, for I know our father is anxious you should marry early, and, perhaps, then you may grow more contented with the quiet life which we lead. Can I guess the name of the lady of your choice? Is it Marion Howe, or one of the Misses Delavere?"

Everard was in his turn slightly confused.

"Your suspicions have fallen quite wide of the mark. Indeed, I suppose your prejudices will be shocked when I tell you that my choice has fallen on Lawyer Thornton's daughter."

"Impossible!" cried Kenneth.

"Why impossible? She seems to me just the sort of filly to reconcile a man to the idea of running in double harness."

"But her father is a rogue—a swindler!"

"What hard names you are giving the venerable old gentleman! But as I have no intention of marrying *him*, it does not matter."

"You know the very sound of his name sends father into a fury."

"Beatrice will change her name when she marries me, so the governor's ears will not be molested by the obnoxious cognomen."

"He would never consent to such a degrading alliance."

"Most likely not, if his consent were asked. We must marry privately. When the knot was tied and could not be unfastened, he would forgive us."

"You would not break our father's heart!"

"It is not quite so brittle as you imagine. Besides, if his favorite son can win a wealthy heiress, it will afford him ample consolation for my shortcomings."

"Does Thornton know of this?" asked Kenneth, suspiciously. "Has he assisted his daughter in drawing you into the net?"

"To do the fellow justice, he is in perfect ignorance of the love-vows exchanged between us. If there is blame in the matter, it rests on no one save myself. I saw Beatrice first at church, was bewitched by her loveliness, afterward managed to meet her pretty regularly in her morning rambles, until, one thrice-happy day, I was fortunate enough to relieve her from the persecution of a half-drunken tramp, who, not satisfied with the alms already bestowed, was proceeding to extort more by sundry alarming menaces. I soon caused the fellow to measure his length on the ground; and the lady, struck by the prowess of her knight, though at first prettily coy, rewarded him with her gratitude, her friendship, and eventually her love!"

"I fear all this will end badly!" observed Kenneth, thoughtfully. "I wish I had not heard your secret!"

"If you cannot approve, at least you will not betray me?" said Everard, hastily. "By your own love for Lilian Merriton I ask you to respect my confidence."

"You need not fear; but if your word be not yet pledged, I would entreat you to reconsider—"

"It is too late!" rejoined his brother, almost fiercely. "The girl has wound herself around my very heart-strings! I would die a thousand deaths sooner than lose her!"

"May she be worthy of such love!" sighed Kenneth, dejectedly.

"I count her more than worthy!—she is a pearl of price! And, hark ye, Kenneth, dismiss at once from your mind the notion that I have been inveigled into this engagement! On the contrary, Beatrice needed much wooing before she owned her affection; while, as to her father, I hear he is persistently urging her to marry his head-clerk, Maxwell, who would be useful to him in matters of business. If you condemn my choice, at least do justice to the girl I love."

Soon after, Kenneth re-entered the house; and Everard, after looking at his watch,

walked briskly down the avenue, finding himself ere long in the dusty country road which led to Lawyer Thornton's ugly red-brick residence.

The moon was slowly rising in the cloudless sky, the stately trees rustled in the soft evening breeze, as he stopped at the well-known wicket-gate, and glanced at the window of Beatrice's apartment.

A light was shining through the curtain, signaling that she would be able to leave the house without fear of discovery; and as he stood a moment gazing on the welcome beacon, old Bridget emerged from the shadows.

"Oh, there you are at last, Mr. Everard!" cried the old woman, who was a devoted adherent of the lovers. "She has been wearying for your coming, poor lamb! Her heart is heavy to-night; maybe you'll be able to cheer it!"

"Is Miss Thornton ill or in trouble?" inquired the young man, eagerly, struck by the dolorous expression of the woman's countenance, and fearing he knew not what.

"She will tell you herself. But don't stay so near the house; master has sharp ears, and might hear us talking."

"I will await her coming at the usual spot. Good-by, Bridget! Tell your young mistress I am impatient to see her!"

He strolled to the end of the lane, and took his station under the canopy formed by the leafy branches of a fine maple tree.

Often had he and Beatrice held their tryst beneath its shadow. He had even fashioned a rustic seat with a large bough growing near the ground.

There he sat down to rest, until he saw the young girl gliding through the darkness, and sprung forward to meet her.

"I have been more cautious this evening, darling!" he whispered, smiling, as he pressed her to his heart, and put aside the waving curls that fell over her smooth, low forehead. "You will not have to scold me again for rousing your father's suspicions. But what is this? Your cheek is wet with tears! Dearest, why are you weeping?"

She disengaged herself from his embrace.

The moonbeams showed him that she was very pale, and that her lips were quivering, as if with pain.

Her voice was strangely hollow and broken as she said:

"Everard, this must be our last meeting, unless your love is strong enough to triumph over all difficulties for my sake!"

"What mean you, Beatrice? What would you have me do?"

"I dare not tell you! You would deem me bold—unmaidenly! I must fulfill my fate, and marry Jerome Maxwell to-morrow!"

"Have I been deceived in you? Are you a flirt, a jilt," he cried, angrily, "instead of the gentle, affectionate girl whose promises I believed would never be broken?"

"I shall never cease to love you," she answered, weeping; "though soon such love will be my misery and shame."

"But this Maxwell?" he persisted. "Why does he dare continue his persecution, and force you into marriage against your inclination?"

"I have not ventured to confess my aversion to the prospect," she faltered; "and my pleadings for delay are treated as childish folly."

"Surely you can assert your right to be consulted on such a subject. If you cared for me, you would successfully resist a coercion which parts us forever."

"But my duty as a daughter appears to demand the sacrifice," sighed Beatrice. "It seems that my father has incurred responsibilities he cannot meet, and Mr. Maxwell promises to settle all demands when I become his wife. He will then be papa's partner, you know," she added.

"You belong to me," he affirmed, energetically, "and have no right to dispose of yourself without my consent. Do you remember the

evening when we exchanged rings, and I gave you half the gold-piece which the blacksmith had broken, telling you to wear it round your neck as a love-token until death divided us? Have you forgotten all the vows you whispered in return? Surely there is nothing so thoroughly weak and vacillating as a woman's fancy!"

Beatrice was stung by his reproaches.

"Instead of blaming me," she said, impetuously, "why do you not rescue me from a fate which I abhor? Come with me now to my father, confess our engagement, promise to aid him in his difficulties—you are a richer man than Jerome Maxwell—and afterward you can ask Mr. Carew's consent to our union."

"My dear girl, I have told you before of my father's prejudices."

"They may be overcome. I have too long supported the ignominy attending these secret meetings, and now your reproaches wound me to the quick. I love you, Everard, faithfully as ever; no happiness the world could give would be comparable to that of being your wife. But in thus frankly owning my devotion, I expect a corresponding unselfishness on your side. For my sake you must endure your father's anger, and yourself bid Jerome Maxwell withdraw his pretensions to the hand of your affianced wife."

Very beautiful she looked, standing erect before him.

The Southern blood of her Italian mother was coursing through her veins in passionate warmth, her dark eyes flashed, her closely-clinched hand was held against her beating heart. Never had Everard seen her so deeply moved.

"Be calm, darling," he murmured, with all a man's horror of a scene, "while I explain to you how erroneous is your opinion of the position which I hold. In the first place, Beatrice, I am not a rich man, but entirely dependent on my father during his lifetime; secondly, I must tell you that he has made me the heir of Fairview on the condition that I marry to suit him, and if I seriously offend him now, I may be a considerable loser at his death. Therefore, common-sense and prudence compel me to be cautious."

"Everard, you have said enough; bid me farewell, and let me go."

Her pride was fired.

She loved him still; but his hesitation in risking pecuniary advantages for the sake of the woman he professed to adore, seemed to her base and unmanly.

"Stay awhile," he entreated, his brain whirling with conflicting emotions. "Let us consult what is best to be done."

"It is wiser to submit to the inevitable," she replied. "Our love has been a bright, brief dream, which must be put aside for the stern realities of life. I must attempt to do my duty as Mr. Maxwell's wife, while you, Everard, will doubtless soon forget me, and be the happy husband of a bride selected by your father's wisdom."

Very bitterly she spoke, though her eyes were heavy with unshed tears, and her hand grew cold in his.

As for Everard Carew, he was almost maddened by love and jealousy.

"Darling, I cannot lose you!" he cried, impetuously. "You must leave this house to-night, with Bridget for your companion, and I will take you both to New York, where we can be married quietly as soon as possible. Father is luckily from home, so will not remark my absence. We must start by the night express; the journey will only take a couple of hours, and I know a lady, an old friend of my dead mother, who will gladly receive you and keep a still tongue."

In his excitement, he thought of no obstacle to his plan; he would have liked to carry her off that very moment, and laugh at Maxwell's discomfiture when he found his bride was missing. Beatrice, however, shook her head with an air of calm decision.

"I could not leave my father to certain

ruin. A heavy bill falls due to-morrow, which Maxwell has promised to meet. Of course, he would be furious at my disappearance, and withdraw his pledge of assistance."

"What sum of money is required to meet the bill?"

"I scarcely know. I fancy it is over a thousand dollars."

"Nothing very ruinous," smiled young Carew, who had been reared in a different school to the lawyer's daughter. "Well, my dearest, make your simple preparations, and bribe Bridget with sweet words and expectation of substantial reward to be the companion of your flight. I will hasten home and shortly return with bank-notes for the amount, which you can inclose in an envelope directed to your father as a gift from his unknown son-in-law elect. That will at least stave off present disagreeables; and when we are married, it will be hard if a Carew cannot give as much aid to his wife's nearest relative as a beggarly fellow like Jerome Maxwell."

If Everard indulged a pleasing belief that a few thousands judiciously bestowed might induce his prospective father-in-law to emigrate to some happy land where lawyers are cordially welcomed, he did not breathe a word of his secret aspirations to Beatrice; and she, poor girl, overwhelmed by his magnanimity and the prospect of avoiding a dreaded bridal, allowed herself to listen to tender pleadings, which found an echo in her own heart.

Nor let us judge her too harshly. Motherless from her birth, neither precept nor example had been given by her remaining parent to fit her for treading unscathed the thorny path of temptation. So, though, at first, she protested against the proposed elopement, Everard's persuasion finally prevailed, and he left her with the understanding that she would be ready to meet him at the same place shortly before midnight.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND SON.

A WILD and reckless, worse than foolish, scheme was maturing in Everard's brain as he hurried homeward. He had promised Beatrice a certain sum of money; but it was not in his present possession, nor could he find means of raising it in the short time left at his disposal.

He was aware that his father had received that afternoon a considerable amount from his agent for the rent of city property, and this he had seen him deposit in his desk. He would borrow (so he phrased it) these bills for a few hours. To-morrow, after leaving Beatrice comfortably established with his friend in New York, he could resort to his old acquaintance, Mr. Aaron, the money-lender, who had removed recently to town, and would be happy to accommodate him with a loan for the trifling consideration of sixty per cent. By the time his father returned from Newark, where he was certain to stay at least a couple of days, the money would be replaced, and no harm done. He knew his father had omitted to take the number of the notes in his hurry to catch the train, so detection was almost impossible; yet he could not stifle the upbraiding voice of conscience which whispered that he purposed acting in a dishonorable, nay criminal, manner.

He reached home at last. Kenneth he believed to be at the Merritons' musical party, which was to take place that evening; but, to make assurance doubly sure, he asked the footman who admitted him whether his brother was out, and received an answer in the affirmative.

When he was sure of being unobserved, he stole into the library. A shaded lamp was burning on the table, leaving the rest of the room in shadow; but he well knew where the desk stood, and could see its silver mountings gleaming in the distance.

The key was kept in a drawer of the writing-table, Mr. Carew being culpably careless in such matters.

Everard easily found and fitted it in the lock. As he did so, a sense of the enormity of his fault came over him.

Were it not for the remembrance that Beatrice was even then preparing to quit her home and trust her future happiness to his care, he would have retreated, leaving the deed undone. But love conquered his scruples, the voice of his good angel was disregarded, and in a moment he was a man degraded in his own eyes, and already conscious that he would reap a bitter harvest from that night's work.

A heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He turned, and confronted his father, tall, stern, and terrible.

"Have I the misery of finding my eldest son a thief?"

"Father!" stammered Everard.

"Dare you call me by that name when, by dishonoring me you have broken the tie between us?"

"I did not expect to find you here."

"So I presume," said Mr. Carew, grimly.

"But I suddenly remembered an important business engagement for to-morrow morning, which I did not feel justified in neglecting; therefore, instead of proceeding on my journey, I got out at the first station, and took a return train home. I was asleep in yonder arm-chair when your entrance awoke me, and I watched your movements."

"I meant to replace the money before your return."

"A poor excuse. Everard Carew, has your love of horses and betting brought you so low? Nor have I deserved this at your hands, for, though I blame my weakness in ministering to your extravagance, twice have I paid your debts without asking too many questions."

"You have not treated me unhandsomely, I own," agreed Everard, gloomily.

"But now all is over between us," continued Mr. Carew; "I must beg you to leave the house as soon as possible, taking with you your ill-gotten gains. You cannot remain here longer; your brother and myself are accustomed to consort only with gentlemen."

"Father, you are cruel!" came with a sharp cry of pain from Everard's lips. "A word of forgiveness from you might have saved me; now I am reckless, and care not whether I take headlong the course that leads to destruction. You need not fear that I will disgrace you, or force you to endure my loathed society. I shall leave New York by the first vessel that sails from the docks, no matter whither bound. Farewell! Your favorite son will console you for my loss."

He flung the notes upon the ground, and strode to the door, but turned upon the threshold to give one more glance at that familiar room, and at his father, whose haggard countenance was convulsed with grief.

"Think of me as kindly as you can," he said, more gently.

The midnight chimes had sounded. Beatrice Thornton, leaning upon Bridget's arm, stood under the maple tree waiting for her lover. Both women were equipped for traveling, and Bridget carried a small black valise, into which she had crammed every available article that she fancied her mistress was like to require until the wedding outfit could be prepared.

The young girl trembled from head to foot; but her companion, charmed with the romance of the adventure which she foresaw would form a basis for unnumbered gossip during the term of her natural life, and not sorry to thwart her master's plans, consoled and supported her as best she could.

Beatrice, before leaving her room, had placed upon the dressing-table a letter containing a few lines, breathing affectionate regret and asking pardon for her flight. It had been arranged that the bank-notes in their envelope were to be laid beside this epistle, Bridget returning to the house for that purpose. The knowledge Beatrice possessed of her father's

character assured her that relief from pecuniary troubles would be the surest compensation for her loss, and she had a vague hope that, once married, she might persuade Everard to let him know—of course, under pledge of profound secrecy—that his runaway daughter was the wife of a Carew, and as such entitled to consider herself on an equality with the proudest matron in the State.

The drooping boughs are pushed suddenly aside, and Everard stands before them. But what a change that single hour has wrought in his appearance! He looks a hunted, desperate man.

"Beatrice," he says, "for love of you I have lost all that men hold most dear—friends, country, home, and my own self-respect. There are many convicted felons less guilty than I; they have outraged the laws of society for bread; I, at the dictates of a fatal passion, have degraded the name I bear, and broken, it may be, my father's heart!"

"Oh, Everard! Everard!" she wailed. "Tell me what all this means!"

"For you I have sinned," he continued, unheeding her request. "Now will you give me my reward, or, like many another temptress, desert the wretch whose ruin you have wrought? In a word, Beatrice, to-morrow I shall be an exile from home. Will you cast in your lot with mine and be my wife, or return to your father's house and forget that I have ever lived?"

Frightened at his almost frantic appeal, and the violence of his demeanor, the young girl scarcely knew what answer to make, but the indignant Bridget threw herself into the fray.

"My poor, dear lady shall not go over the seas with a madman!" she cried, decisively, taking the trembling Beatrice to her bosom.

"You ought to be ashamed, Mr. Carew, so you ought, to come here using such language and rolling your eyes like the clown at the circus, when this innocent lamb has done no harm either to you or yours. She would make too good a wife for the like of you. And, oh! I repent the day I ever let myself be talked over to help you in your courting; but it was all for the sake of my dear young mistress."

"Give me my answer, Beatrice," persisted the young man.

"If already I have injured you so deeply," she murmured, "it might be better that our fates should not be linked together."

"You have made a wise choice," he said, with sullen calmness. "Go home, Beatrice, and to-morrow stand at the altar by Jerome Maxwell's side; he will never guess how nearly he had lost his bride."

As he turned and left her without another word, Beatrice gave a faint cry, and would have fallen senseless to the ground had not Bridget caught her in her arms, and supported her to the rustic seat.

Just then the tramping of a horse's hoofs became audible in the road, and Jerome Maxwell, mounted on his stout gray mare appeared in sight, having been spending a convivial evening with his friend Barton. His eagle eye soon fell upon the pair.

"What do I see?" he cried, hurriedly dismounting and coming toward them. "Why are you here at this hour, Bridget, with Miss Thornton? Is she ill? Has she met with an accident?"

"Oh, please go away, Mr. Maxwell, without asking questions," pleaded Bridget, still in tears. "She is coming to herself, and the very sight of you will make her worse."

"Woman! you forget that in a few hours your young mistress will be my wife. I have a right to ask for an explanation of this scene, and if both you and she refuse to give it, I shall expect her father to inform me why he suffered his daughter to be abroad at midnight without his protection."

Thus brought to bay, Bridget considered for a moment whether she would appeal to his generosity or tell a falsehood sufficiently plausible to allay his suspicions. Reluctantly

she resolved to confess at least a portion of the truth.

"I am going to tell you a secret, Mr. Maxwell," she began, coaxingly, "though she would never forgive me if she knew. She came here to-night to say good-by to a young gentleman who has been courting her on the sly for some time past, and it is only natural that she should be a little overcome. Now don't you be angry; for there's few folks, they say, that marries their first love, yet they make none the less good husbands and wives when their turn comes. Just take my advice, and ride quietly on, for it would worry the poor dear out of her senses again if she found you here when she recovers. See, she moves; she will soon be as well as ever. I will take her home presently, and when you are once her young man, I'll engage she'll never waste another thought upon young Carew."

Jerome stood silent, seemingly undecided what to say or do. He almost shuddered as Beatrice slowly unclosed her eyes and the name of his rival escaped her lips. But Bridget impatiently waved him away in token of dismissal, and he may have felt that it would be impolite to provoke an open rupture with a girl whose indifference he had from the first more than suspected.

So it happened that when Beatrice's consciousness fully returned, she found herself alone with the simple but kindly domestic, who, as she carefully supported her trembling steps toward the house, was cautious not to reveal the fact that the expectant bridegroom of to-morrow was cognizant of the lovers' meeting under the trysting tree.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. WILLIAM SMITH.

NEARLY a year had passed since Everard Carew quitted Fairview, and during that period no communication from him had been received by his family or friends.

"Let him go," Mr. Carew had said to Kenneth, his only confidant. "I never wish to see him again. After my death he will soon return with pretended grief and real gladness, to take possession of all that will be then his own. I do not mean to be vindictive beyond the grave, and shall not alter my will as I had at first thought of doing. He shall have an elder son's portion; perhaps time and experience may teach him wisdom and honorable feeling. If he comes no more to Fairview during my lifetime, you can give him my forgiveness and blessing."

Kenneth promised to comply with this request, but was hopeful that a reconciliation might be effected between father and son.

A small party assembled one evening in the long drawing-room. It consisted of the rector and his wife, Mrs. Blake (a widowed sister of Mr. Carew), Mr. Merriton and his daughter Lilian.

Lilian was a charming girl, fragile in form, aristocratic-looking, and refined in feature, with a profusion of pale golden hair curled over her broad, white forehead, and twisted into innumerable braids and coils behind her head. She wore a perfectly-fitting dress of cream-colored cashmere and silk, trimmed with lace of the same hue, relieved by a cluster of deep crimson flowers at the bosom. Pearls of great size and value encircled both neck and arms, harmonizing with the delicacy of her fair complexion.

"Your father looks worn and harassed lately," she said to Kenneth, with the freedom of a friendship dating from childhood. "Has he been ill?"

"Not quite so well as usual, although he never likes to be pressed with questions on the subject. I am rather uneasy about him."

"I have noticed a change ever since your brother went abroad. Why do you not write and tell him to come home?"

Mr. Villars, the rector, who was standing near, here joined in the conversation.

"You are speaking of Mr. Carew's health,"

he observed, with the pompous solemnity he considered suitable to his clerical dignity. "Mr. Kenneth, it is your duty to advise him to have recourse to medical skill. The first symptoms of disease should be checked, for every day we see around us instances of the uncertainty of human life. Have you heard that Thornton, the lawyer, died last week and was buried yesterday?"

Kenneth professed a proper amount of interest in this melancholy intelligence, and Lilian cried eagerly: "Oh, he was the father of that beautiful girl of whom my maid told me such a romantic story. I always pitied her so much."

"I know the story to which you allude. She was seized with a fever on the very morning appointed for her marriage, and although her bodily health is quite restored, she suffers still from fits of deep depression, which show her mental powers are impaired."

"It was altogether sad," observed Lilian, turning from the pompous rector to her younger companion. "She was engaged to a Mr. Maxwell, who afterward became her father's partner. All the bridal preparations were completed, and she was dressing for the important ceremony, when, just as the wreath of orange-blossom was being fastened in her hair, she tottered and fell to the ground. It soon became evident that she was alarmingly ill, and a messenger was dispatched to the church, where Mr. Maxwell awaited the coming of his bride, to warn him that no wedding could take place that day. You can imagine his grief and disappointment."

"Is the engagement broken off?" asked Kenneth, with some curiosity.

"Oh, dear, no," said Lilian, shaking her sunny head. "Mr. Maxwell, I am told, is devotedly attached to the lady, and is ready to wait with patience until she is quite recovered. It is not every woman who can inspire so deep an affection. We must generally rest contented with that light love which vanishes at the first cloud of sickness or sorrow."

"You cannot seriously mean to utter such a libel on our sex!" returned the rector, while Lilian blushed deeply at finding Kenneth's pale face fixed upon her in grave reproach.

They were talking when the butler entered, wearing rather a perturbed air, as if his dignified calmness had received a shock. He took his way to Mr. Carew, who was sitting a little apart from the rest, and whispered a few sentences.

"Some one desires to see me at this hour," repeated his master, "and will neither give his name nor state his business! Tell him, Morrison, that I am engaged, and he must call to-morrow."

Morrison departed to give the message, but soon returned.

"I told him, Mr. Carew, that you had company, and he said that he brought news more interesting than all their talk, and that if you refused to see him now, he would take no further trouble in the matter. I think—I think it is something about Mr. Everard."

"I will speak to him in the study," said Mr. Carew, hastily.

With an apology to his guests, and a few words of explanation to Kenneth, he left the drawing-room, and descended the broad staircase to the library.

The visitor was standing on the hearth-rug, twisting his felt hat nervously in his hands, and staring about him at the unaccustomed splendor of oak and gold fittings, handsome furniture and bookcases filled with splendidly-bound volumes.

He was tall and lithe in figure, not bad-looking, but with a cunning expression. He was attired somewhat in nautical fashion, wearing a thick pilot coat, a blue-checked shirt, and a dark silk handkerchief carelessly knotted round his throat.

"What is your business with me, my man?" asked Mr. Carew. "It should be something important to excuse your urgent message."

"You needn't be so sharp on a cove who has

come miles out of his way to do you a service," retorted the other, in an injured tone. "But I had given my word, and Bill Smith was always a good-natured fool, ready to do his utmost to oblige a friend."

"Well, Mr. Smith, why do you wish to see me?"

"Don't you ever look for news of your eldest son, Mr. Everard Carew?" answered the stranger, with a keen glance from under his beetling brows; "the same who left home a twelvemonth come June, and went across the sea to the diamond-fields of Brazil."

"Do you bring news of him?" cried Mr. Carew, with ill-concealed anxiety.

"We went out together in the good ship Morning Star, and though he was a swell, and I only a poor workingman, striving to better my fortune, we somehow got familiar-like, and I used to tell him all about the country, where I passed a couple of years when quite a lad. When we landed at Rio I lost sight of him; but we happened to meet again at the diggings, and became close pals. Lor', I could spin you a long yarn, if it was worth my while, of all the troubles and dangers we went through together."

"Confine yourself to the chief points in your story," said Mr. Carew, attempting to speak with calmness, although his voice slightly trembled. "Where is my son now? Is he well?"

Mr. Smith shook his head dolefully.

"Poor fellow, he is dead! Some say the climate is wonderfully healthy; but it didn't suit him, and what with the hard work, that he hadn't been used to, he kinder grew weaker daily, and at last went off."

"What proof have you of his death?" said Mr. Carew, in a hoarse tone. "Perhaps you are mistaken altogether. Your comrade may not have been my son," he added, with feverish energy.

"Oh, don't think there's any mistake in the matter! Just afore he died, after he had been thanking me for all my little attentions, he told me that his father was an *Honorable*, living at a place called Fairview, near Madison. He said there had been a squabble about money, and that was the reason he left the State in a hurry. Then he asked me, if I went back, according to my intention, would I go to his father, the Hon. Claude Carew, and tell him his eldest son, Madcap Everard, would never trouble him again."

"And then, he died," said Mr. Carew, slowly. "Have you any certificate of his death?"

The man produced a slip of paper from his pocket, and handed it to the other.

"I don't know whether you will find it quite a formal dockymment," he remarked. "They are not too particular at the diggings. But, anyway, it will be a satisfaction to your mind to see it."

"This is a certificate of the death of one Joseph Smith," said Mr. Carew, sternly eyeing his strange visitor. "What interest can it be to me?"

"Smith is a mighty convenient *alias* for a gent to use when he wants to drop, as it were, into another spear," remarked the other, with a knowing wink. "We Smiths are such a large family that no one asks any orkard questions. It was only just at the last that I knew that my pal's real name was Everard Carew, and being a secret, I was bound not to make it common talk by mentioning it to the doctor."

"Your story may be true," said Mr. Carew, doubtfully; "and yet—"

"If you doubt an honest man's word, Mr. Carew," cried Mr. William Smith, with a show of indignation, "the sooner we parts company the better. But I ask you, as a gentleman, why I should have traveled all these miles, if it had not been to keep my promise to a poor young chap, dying far from home and friends?"

"I do not say that it is not so, but this story may be fabricated through hope of a reward. The certificate does not bear my son's

name, and there is no proof of his death save your bare assertion."

The man rattled out a volley of oaths, and lashed himself into a fury.

"You gentlefolks think no one else has any proper feeling. As for your money, I'd throw it in the gutter afore I'd accept a penny! So now I wish you a very good-evening, and I reckon you won't find William Smith such a fool as to do a good-natured thing to serve a friend in a hurry, let him be living or dead!"

He opened the library door, tramped heavily through the vestibule, and Mr. Carew heard the outer portal close upon him. Then, for the first time, his firmness gave way.

While he thus yielded to a burst of natural grief, his late visitor walked swiftly down the avenue, his mouth widening into a grin.

Scarcely had he passed through the lodge gates, when Jerome Maxwell darted from the shadow of the high hedge, and demanded:

"Well, Smith, how have you prospered?"

"Done the job neatly, I flatter myself, Mr. Maxwell. If the old cove does not believe his son has kicked the bucket it's no fault of mine."

"Did he ask many questions, or seem doubtful about the certificate?"

"Well, he was rather flabbergasted with the change of names; but I put on a bold front, and argued out the matter, as you bade me. It was lucky for you that my poor brother Joe, who died in Brazil, was about the same age as young Carew, or we might not have got over the difficulty so well."

Mr. Maxwell smiled.

"It would have involved an extra amount of trouble. There is nothing like judicious forethought in matters of business."

"Forgery is always dangerous," observed Mr. Smith, sententiously; "but the best regulated mind is apt to fall into a mistake. If Mr. Carew were to come back next week, nothing could be proved against us. We had only been deluded by some cock-and-bull story told by a young chap now dead."

"Be pleased to remark," hissed Jerome, his brow darkening, "that I have made no communication to Mr. Claude Carew which may one day be contradicted. At your own risk and responsibility you undertook the commission with which I intrusted you, on terms agreed upon between us. You have performed your share of the transaction, and will receive the reward stipulated—namely, silence respecting certain antecedents not redounding to your credit, and a sum of money that, if you are prudent, will keep you from want until you are able to obtain honest employment. This agreement was made verbally and without witness, therefore I advise you not to feel tempted to mention my name should further discussion arise concerning this evening's interview at Fairview."

"Don't you fancy I want to split. 'A still tongue makes a wise head' is my motto."

"If you did split, as you call it, you could not injure me. I should positively deny our acquaintance, and my character stands rather higher than yours, considering you are an old jail-bird."

"You have no call to throw it in my teeth if I have been in trouble. I never yet peached upon a pal, nor shall I now; so make your mind at ease."

"I am not uneasy, William Smith. You are too sensible a man to offend me willingly. Why, the other evening, when we met by chance in the square, and you offered to relieve me of my watch and any superfluous cash I might carry about me, you were too wise to persist in your demand when you had recognized me. For my own part, I have a good memory, and immediately recollected my former client."

"Well, Mr. Maxwell, it is waste of time to stand palavering here."

"Perfectly correct. Besides, you understand that I wish you to leave this neighborhood. Mr. Carew can then take no further steps to obtain from you such particulars of

his son's death as you might find it difficult to concoct."

"All right, gov'nor; I am off by the next train."

Jerome took from his pocket-book a roll of crisp bank-notes, which he counted into his companion's eager palm.

"Three tens—four fives—fifty in all. Good pay, I think, Mr. Smith, for such a trifling service."

The gentleman addressed gave a knowing wink and started on his way to the nearest railway station.

CHAPTER V.

JEROME PERSEVERES.

POOR and friendless as Beatrice was now, broken in health and spirits, her beauty faded until, in Bridget's estimation (who loved blooming cheeks and sparkling eyes), it was scarcely more than a memory of the past, it is no wonder that the worthy domestic should be anxious to see her well settled in life.

Everard Carew had vanished; why should not Jerome Maxwell become his successor in the affections of Beatrice, and the long-postponed marriage take place at last?

So Bridget pondered over the matter as she employed her time in trimming her Sunday bonnet black, of course to show respect to the memory of the late Mr. Thornton, whom in her heart she detested.

"I'm sure Miss Beatrice is enough to wear one's patience out to see her sit moping there day after day. I'd sooner she was deaf and dumb, for then, I suppose, she would talk with her fingers, and be a better companion. Really, she wants a rousing up, and I shall give her a bit of my mind. Miss Beatrice, dear," she began, in a coaxing tone, "are you not tired of sitting still, for all the world like a statue? Why should you not go out and get a little fresh air, or else read the book that Mr. Maxwell brought himself from the library, because he thought it might amuse you?"

"Thank you, Bridget; I know you mean well, but I do not care for change of scene, and hate reading."

"Never was there such a strange young lady! Mr. Maxwell will soon pay you his daily visit, and if you will not walk down the road to meet him, you had best shake off your gloom, and seem a little glad to give him welcome."

"You are fast becoming a zealous partisan of Mr. Maxwell's, Bridget."

"Small blame if I am. You want a husband and protector, Miss Beatrice."

A spark of the old fire came into the girl's dark eyes as she answered: "My heart is given to Everard Carew, and while he lives I will never become the wife of another. I am thankful that my illness saved me from committing a grievous sin; for I should have perjured myself at the altar had I stood before it with Jerome Maxwell."

"Miss Beatrice, your youth will slip away while you are fretting over the loss of a lover who gave you up too easily. Every year will see some change, until you get old, and gray, and wrinkled; that you will regret this folly."

"I shall never regret escaping from the shackles of a loveless marriage."

"If you were rich and independent, it would be different," argued Bridget. "Somehow, rich people can always find friends who flatter and study to please them. But you will not have a friend in the world if you send Mr. Maxwell away. Indeed, dear child, if you are wise, you will cease crying over spilt milk, and make the best of things as they are."

"You give me bad advice!" cried Beatrice, impatiently. "Why will you not suppose that Everard may return, faithful and fond as ever, to claim me for his wife? Whatever trouble may have made him speak and act so strangely in our last interview I know not; but when its shadow is dispersed, he will come to me again."

"That can never be," was the reply.

"Have you heard news of him?" asked Beatrice, anxiously.

"My dear, I know nothing for sure; but it is the talk of the town that Mr. Carew's eldest son is dead."

There was no violent burst of grief, no sudden exclamation. A gasp for breath, a short, convulsive sob as Beatrice bowed her head upon her clasped hands; then she said, almost calmly, "Ours from the first has been an ill-fated love. I have struggled bravely against evil forebodings, but never quite successfully; yet, my love, it is hard to believe that you are lost to me forever!"

The tears rained down between her slender fingers as her last hope died away.

An energetic grasp was on her shoulder, and Bridget's voice sounded warningly in her ear.

"Mr. Maxwell is coming through the garden-gate. Surely you would not give him reason to suspect that you are crying out your eyes because of young Carew's death?"

Bridget's zeal had outrun her discretion. She forgot that Beatrice was unaware of Jerome's knowledge that the heir of Fairview had been a favored suitor.

Luckily, however, Beatrice, in her agitation, let the words pass unnoticed.

The tall, sprucely-dressed figure of the young lawyer appeared on the threshold just as Miss Thornton managed to gain an outward semblance of composure.

He sunk into his usual seat beside her, asked tender questions regarding her health, and conducted himself altogether in a manner so perfectly accordant with Bridget's notions of an irresistible wooer, that the worthy matron, after poising the completed bonnet on her huge fist, where it perched like some bird of evil omen, took her way to the lower regions, with a firm conviction that, sooner or later, the matter would be settled agreeably to her desires.

When she had gone, Jerome drew his chair still nearer to the object of his love, and said, in softly-modulated tones, "Beatrice, are you well enough to listen to me while I speak about your future plans?"

She bowed her head assentingly.

"You know, my darling, that for some time past your father's affairs had been growing gradually more involved. For your sake I made many efforts to save him; but he had a mania for speculation, and his investments often proved wretched failures. I am myself much impoverished through his imprudence, but I do not mean to speak of that."

"You have been generous, I know," she said, gently; "and he always esteemed your kindness."

"Was it not natural that your father should have the highest claim upon me? But, dearest, how can I tell you? When all just debts are paid, you will be left nearly penniless."

"I am not surprised," she answered, calmly; "and the prospect of poverty does not appall me."

"Because you have never realized its worst aspect. Beatrice, I implore you to reconsider your determination. You have told me that our engagement must be broken, that its fulfillment would entail upon you a life-long wretchedness, because you do not love me as a wife should love her husband. Oh, why should you let a caprice, a fancy, interfere with your father's cherished plan and my happiness? Place once more your hand in mine; let us plight our troth anew."

"Jerome, I cannot."

"Do you prefer a life of toil and poverty to being my wife in a home where you would be surrounded with every comfort? Am I so unendurable that you could not learn to love me?"

"That is a lesson which should be laid to heart before marriage."

"I could be contented if you performed a wife's duty until my patient devotion had won your heart."

"Jerome, do not tempt me," she cried, impatiently. "I was once nearly led into a

grievous mistake, but I feared to rebel openly against my father."

"You think it would have been a mistake to marry me? Beatrice, have you no feeling for the bitterness of my disappointment? Happiness seemed just within my grasp when it dissolved into air."

"I am sorry," she faltered.

"That is what you women say when your indecision and caprice drive men to madness. But forgive me; I did not wish to wound or reproach you. If you cannot accept me as a lover, at least you will allow me a brother's privilege of offering such aid as may enable you to remain in your old home, and miss none of your accustomed comforts."

"How good you are!" she said, gratefully, giving him her hand. "But I could not receive such favors; my self-respect would suffer. My future plans are already decided. A cousin of Bridget's rents a cottage at no great distance; I intend to live with her, and work for my own support."

"You will not even view me as your father's friend?" he said reproachfully. "Are we to be entire strangers?"

"For old friendship's sake I shall always welcome you."

Jerome had succeeded in tracing young Carew from Madison to New York, from thence to the deck of a provision-ship sailing to South America. It was evidently his intention to hide his identity under a feigned name and leave no clew by which relatives or friends could gain knowledge of his subsequent movements.

And if, in the course of years, he became tired of masquerading, and returned to reclaim his heritage, he might find Beatrice Thornton had changed her name to Maxwell and all regrets would be too late.

As Jerome crossed the square he came upon a small riding-party, consisting of Mr. Carew and Mr. Merriton well in front, discussing, if he only could have known it, the feasibility of certain schemes for obtaining more authentic intelligence of Everard's decease; while in the rear Kenneth and Lilian rode slowly side by side.

The girl looked her prettiest in her neatly-fitting habit, with a delicate flush upon her cheek, produced either by exercise in the open air, or the softly-whispered words of her companion, or by both combined, perhaps.

Jerome eyed them, and smiled sardonically.

"Now that Master Kenneth has reason to hope that fortune has given him both his own and his brother's inheritance, he pays court to the wealthy heiress; while she, I warrant, would not receive his attentions quite so favorably if she did not believe that William Smith's romance had some foundation in truth."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAVELER'S RETURN.

THE busy streets of New York are comparatively quiet and deserted, for the stores are closed, and it is such a damp, dull, drizzling evening that the ordinary mind appreciates the advantages of a sheltering roof and cosy cup of tea.

Even the street musicians recognize the improbability of obtaining audiences and prepare to finish business for the night, while the street beggar glances longingly at the doorway where he would fain take shelter did he not fear the lynx eye of the policeman and the peremptory mandate, "Move on!"

Either reckless or too deeply engrossed in thought to be conscious of the bad weather, Everard Carew walked slowly down Broadway.

Three years an exile from his native land, he had only recently disembarked from the clipper-ship Amazonia, which had brought him back to the States and Beatrice after his long wanderings. Yes, Beatrice was the magnet that had drawn him with irresistible force back from the land of his wanderings.

He cared not to revisit the home from which he had been banished, to receive, perhaps, a

reluctant pardon for his fault, or even to be reinstated in his old privileges as heir to Fairview; but he longed to know whether this girl, whom he had loved even above honor and self-respect, was still free, and faithful to the memory of that short, sweet dream, which had so abruptly ended.

During his wanderings in South America he had received no letters from home, nor had he cared to read the newspapers, from which he might have learned that his father was dead, and that a large reward was offered for any reliable testimony as to his own decease.

He knew not that detective skill had been employed upon his behalf, without eliciting any satisfactory proof that Joseph Smith had not been the heir to the Carew estate.

Everard had undergone many vicissitudes in the three years' absence from home, sometimes brought face to face with want, then raised by a sudden stroke of good fortune to a generally short-lived state of prosperity.

His associates had been neither select nor few; many of their characters would not have borne inspection; others had sprung from the lowest grade of society. Aristocratic Mr. Carew, or even Kenneth, would have shuddered at seeing a scion of their patrician race amid such companions.

But Everard was not so scrupulous. Indeed, his disregard for conventionalities, and happy knack of adapting himself to the taste of those with whom his temporary lot happened to be cast, stood him in good stead, and his love of adventure prevented him feeling too deeply the changes through which he passed.

It was in San Francisco that his luck seemed permanently to change for the better.

By a fortunate accident he was able to render a service to the owner of a rich tract of mining-land in Nevada. The man was grateful, and finding young Carew had no fixed employment, and was altogether in an impecunious condition, offered him the situation of overseer to the mine. His liberal terms were accepted.

Everard worked hard, made money, and would have been happier in distant California than among the *elite* of society in his own home if he could have forgotten Lawyer Thornton's daughter.

She held a prominent place in his thoughts this gloomy autumnal evening, when the starless sky, the wet pavement, the steady falling rain, made a desolate picture had he chosen to observe it, but the hopes and fears that agitated his mind banished all sense of bodily discomfort.

In fancy he was far away from the muddy city streets, waiting under the trysting tree for the sound of that light footstep, or listening to the timid accents in which Beatrice had owned reciprocal love.

Should he write, announcing his arrival in New York, and making arrangements for a meeting at the old spot? Or had she been coerced by her odious father into marrying Jerome Maxwell?

These questions incessantly recurred, without gaining satisfactory answers. Yet hope whispered that she would summon firmness to resist all pressure that might be put upon her, and remain constant to her first love.

He was crossing the end of a narrow street, heedless in his present frame of mind of a growing noise and confusion, the sound of shouting voices, the tramp of many feet. Suddenly a fire-engine dashed round the corner on its way to a conflagration at no great distance.

Everard, by a hasty movement, was attempting to avoid it, when his foot slipped on the muddy stones, and he would have fallen under the horses' hoofs had not two strong hands dragged him from his perilous position.

"A narrow escape, gov'nor," remarked his preserver when they were both in safety on the pavement. "If your life's of any value, I 'spose you won't grudge a poor devil who is down upon his luck some reward for saving it?"

The speaker was not a very prepossessing object. His tattered clothes hung loosely on his tall, gaunt frame, his face had a pinched, cadaverous look, his eyes were deeply sunken in their sockets. There was a fawning smile upon his thin lips, contrasting with the scowl upon his brow, that would have prejudiced a physiognomist against him at first sight.

But Everard was no physiognomist, and saw nothing beyond outward signs of want, which moved his heart to pity.

"Certainly I will reward you," he answered, "for you well deserve to be recompensed for your pluck and presence of mind. But I have scarcely any money with me; you must come to my hotel."

"I'll come anywhere for a trifle of the needful. You fine gents don't know how hard it is for a chap to earn an honest living, or sometimes even to get a bit of bread."

"I know it, my man, only too well," replied Everard, recollecting his struggle for bare subsistence scarcely two years before. "I have roughed it myself, not only in this country, but across the sea, and my experience has taught me to feel for the trouble of others."

"Ah, if there were more gents in the world like you," returned his companion, in a burst of enthusiasm, "who would be ready to hold out a helping hand to a poor cove floundering in the mire, there would be less vice and misery in this great town."

They were walking toward the hotel where Everard had taken up his quarters for the present, and on the way thither young Carew, unheeding the curious glances that were bent upon them, beguiled the time with a graphic narration of sundry adventures he had met with on the other side of the continent, in requital of which confidence Mr. William Smith (for the stranger who had rendered Everard such timely assistance was no other than that worthy) launched forth into certain descriptive passages of his own career, that, far from being founded on fact, were lofty flights of imagination.

He was poor, he owned, but that was no crime. His virtues, such as honesty, industry, and sobriety, exposed him to the persecution of the lawless crew among whom he was forced to dwell. His sole yearning was to lead a life of humble respectability, and if kindly fate threw him across the path of any one sufficiently kind-hearted and generous to be willing to relieve unobtrusive merit in distress, his warmest gratitude would repay his benefactor's goodness.

Everard was impulsive to a fault. Besides, the remembrance that the man had in all probability saved his life pleaded irresistibly in his favor.

"You have found the friend you need," said he heartily; "henceforth it will be your own fault if you fall into this state of abject wretchedness. Do not accompany me now to my hotel; the people there might recognize you when you appear before them in another character, but take this change to supply your immediate wants, and give me your name and address."

Mr. Smith mentioned his plain cognomen, and the filthy alley near the Five Points, where he was at present located.

Everard carefully noted name and address in his pocketbook, and the two separated, mutually satisfied as to the result of their conversation. The one rejoicing that he had found an easy dupe, the other maturing in his brain one of those wild schemes which had formerly earned him the nick-name of Madcap Everard.

Before the week was over William Smith had undergone a wonderful transformation.

His unkempt hair was closely cropped, his face clean, and no longer disfigured by the stubbly beard, a neat suit of clothes replaced his tatters, and his whole appearance indicated that a marked improvement in his condition had taken place.

This was indeed the case, for taken from the wretched home where dirt, famine, and disease

seemed almost to wear bodily form and dog the footsteps of its denizen, he was ensconced in comfortable rooms, well clothed and fed as the servant of Everard Carew.

No more purloining from shop or pocket, whichever was most conveniently near; no more dread of the policeman's step, of stern magistrate or prison fare.

After all, thieving is scarcely a paying vice, as witness the miserable looks of many an area sneak. William Smith began to think he should thrive better in a more reputable atmosphere. He enjoyed the novel sensation of living at another's expense without fear of unpleasant consequences.

One thing he learned which invested his new master with a halo of interest. He was the Everard Carew whose death he had announced on that unforgettable evening when, at the lawyer's instigation, he paid a visit to Fairview.

How well he remembered the handsome library with its oak furniture and well filled bookshelves, and the tall, gray-haired old man, who questioned him so eagerly, while he, well-tutored in falsehood by his crafty employer, recounted the story that carried its death wound to a proud but not unloving heart.

He began to wonder if it were possible to betray Maxwell without damaging his own cause, and decided that the instinct of self-preservation required him to keep silence. The knowledge of a master's secret is, however, always useful. Between Mr. Carew and the lawyer he might manage to make a little money without compromising his safety.

While William Smith thus studied his own interests, Everard Carew, in his careless fashion, gave him such instructions as fitted him for the situation of valet and butler to a single gentleman, and was daily more pleased with the man's shrewdness and seeming gratitude.

He had removed from the hotel into comfortable furnished apartments, and there he still lingered, scarce knowing how best to communicate with Beatrice in his ignorance of all that might have occurred during his long absence.

At length he concluded it would be the wisest plan to write to her, giving a brief summary of his career since they had parted, and entreating her, if she were still free and had not ceased to love him, to be once again at the trysting-tree on a certain evening. He should know then whether her affection had braved the ordeal of time and trouble, and if she were ready to fulfill her vows by linking her fate to his. In short, the question should be at once decided whether he might hope to enjoy a life blest by domestic happiness or wander forth once more an exile from her presence, relinquishing all claims to his patrimony in favor of his brother Kenneth.

The long epistle was completed. He read it over with the well-pleased thought that her eyes would soon rest upon the lines, and brighten as they gazed on each term of endearment. He could hardly realize the anguish of the misgiving that stole over him when he reflected that she might long since have given her hand to his rival, and instead of a welcome harbinger of happiness, his letter might only be regarded as the bearer of distressing tidings.

Never mind; he must put his fortune to the test, trusting all would be well.

Before he consigned the paper to its envelope he added a few words:—

"I shall write by this post to my brother. He and I were always good friends, so I mean to acquaint him with my arrival in New York, and he may use his own discretion as to whether he will keep the matter secret from my father."

Then he fastened the letter in its receptacle, and took up his pen to write to Kenneth.

"He was alive and well—he loved her still. Her troubles were over; they were to be reunited, and never part again."

In her tumultuous joy Beatrice could hardly believe the evidence of her senses. Over and over she read the precious words, while hope

and happiness lighted up her countenance and restored its pristine beauty.

"Bridget, rejoice, rejoice!" she cried, as the dame, more portly and rosy than ever, with silver threads showing in greater abundance amid her light-brown hair, came into the humble room they called their own. "Mr. Carew is in New York, he writes; and, oh, I cannot tell you all he says, but everything that is kind and loving!"

In the extremity of her surprise, Bridget sunk down upon the nearest chair and began to fan herself with a corner of her apron, as if fearful that feverish symptoms had brought on some hallucination of the brain.

"Mr. Carew is dead!" she ejaculated solemnly. "They've worn mourning for him at Fairview, and you will never have a colored ribbon or flower to brighten up your dress, because you made up your mind to wear black all your life for love of him!"

"Bridget, you dear, silly old woman, can you not see we were mistaken? Some false rumor misled us all. But it does not matter now. A living, loving hand traced these words. And as for always wearing black, why you shall make me look as gay and pretty as you can this very day, for I am to meet Everard at the old trysting place! I knew his handwriting at once," she continued. "The letter was addressed to me at The Hermitage, but the postman (knowing that I had removed here when Mr. Maxwell took up his residence at my old home) brought it on to me. Only fancy, if my precious letter had been mislaid or lost!"

"I wonder what Mr. Kenneth will say to this?" remarked Bridget, slowly.

"He ought to be delighted at his brother's return. But there is no telling; this is a strange world."

"I'm thinking that he will not be best pleased at the change. He is to be married tomorrow to Miss Merriton, and I doubt if her father would have consented to the match if he had believed the heir of Fairview was still alive."

"By this time the news has reached Fairview," said Beatrice. "Everard has written to his brother, and, of course, it will be at once made public that the family were deceived when they supposed him dead."

"It is hard upon the poor young man, for I expect the marriage will be broken off, and I hear he is devotedly attached to Miss Merriton. But the old fellow—I mean her father—has always looked so high for his daughter, that you may depend, Miss Beatrice, he will not be satisfied with seeing her the wife of even Mr. Kenneth."

Beatrice was wounded by Bridget's speeches, which more than implied a doubt as to the general rejoicings for Everard's return. She began to distrust Kenneth, who might even sorrow at what was to her a source of deepest joy, and could not help owning that most men would find it hard to relinquish land, wealth, perhaps a lovely bride, in order to welcome a truant brother back once more.

A foreboding of evil seized her, though the next moment she was angry with herself at allowing a single misgiving to alloy her happiness.

Beatrice stood before her mirror, wondering if Everard would find her altered in appearance through time and trouble, and fearing lest she should read in his eyes a certain sense of disappointment at the sight of her faded beauty. Yet she had no real reason for alarm on that score.

There is no such rapid and successful beautifier as happiness; already her cheeks were recovering their lost bloom, and dimpling into smiles—already her dark orbs sparkled under their long lashes with the brightness of the days when love had taught them to shine with new luster.

She arranged her luxuriant hair in the fashion he had been wont to praise, adjusted her dress with the anxious care of a woman who desires to appear at the zenith of her

attractions; then, as the hour appointed for the meeting was drawing near, quietly left the cottage, and took her way toward the road leading to The Hermitage. One passing thought disturbed her mind.

She might, possibly, meet Jerome Maxwell, who would marvel at finding her walking alone at so late an hour, and detain her in conversation while Everard was impatiently waiting her arrival.

She liked Jerome well enough since he no longer wearied her with unwelcome protestations, but contented himself with assuming the position of brotherly friend. Yet, at such a crisis, he would be decidedly in the way. The evening was dark and chilly.

A rising wind blew showers of leaves from the trees under which she passed, and as they fluttered across her cheek or rustled beneath her footstep, the air seemed peopled by mischievous sprites, who mocked at the instability of human love, and moaned forth a requiem over disappointed hopes.

By turns, she felt the ecstasy of overwhelming joy and the depression of anticipated sorrow.

The moon, frequently obscured by heavy clouds, gave an uncertain light for a few moments, then suddenly disappeared again.

The cry of some night-bird from the neighboring wood rung out upon the silence, and made her heart throb with strange alarm—for excitement had unstrung her nerves, and every unaccustomed sound made her tremble.

How she longed for the moment when Everard's voice should dispel these idle fears, and feeling once more the pressure of his arms around her, she might give herself up unreservedly to dreams of future happiness!

She had nearly reached the spot. Already she fancied his figure might be descried in the distance, and hurried forward with words of welcome hovering on her lips.

Suddenly she stumbled and almost fell over a large, dark, heavy object lying across her path—the body of a man!

A horrible fear stole over her; the tide of life seemed receding from her heart, and a dread of the discovery she might be fated to make nearly drove her frantic.

Falling on her knees beside the insensible form, her dress became stained by a crimson flood that was saturating the short grass on which she knelt.

The moonbeams, struggling from behind gathering clouds, only revealed sufficient to increase her terror and consternation.

The dead man's features were indistinguishable. They had become defaced beyond recognition. But on his left hand was a ring that she had often noticed glittering on Everard's finger, and the handkerchief peeping from the breast-pocket of his coat bore the familiar monogram of her lover.

She doubted no longer that it was upon him she gazed.

He had been brutally slain at the moment when years of trial and constancy were to receive their just recompense.

All aid was vain. She, who would have risked her life to save him, had arrived too late.

One thing alone remained by which to prove her devotion to his memory.

She would live for revenge, and hunt down Everard's assassin.

Thus she vowed, kneeling beside the body, dedicating her life to the completion of her self-appointed task.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTERRUPTED BRIDAL.

THE skies were propitious on Lilian Merriton's bridal morning; the sun shone forth from a wide expanse of blue, as if autumn were anxious to assume the brightness of spring in honor of the gentle girl's approaching nuptials. Very fair and winning she looked in the exquisite dress sent from abroad by Worth, with orange-flowers and stephanotis half hidden in her clustering hair—a fairy-like vision sudden-

ly appearing to the sight of her fond father, whom she disturbed from a hurried perusal of the morning paper in the seclusion of his study.

"Papa, you must really admire me in this beautiful dress—your own present, too! I fear you will find that Monsieur Worth has been rather extravagant in the matter of lace, but as you ordered no expense to be spared to make me presentable for this important event, you cannot very well complain."

"I am not apt to complain of anything conducing to your pleasure. As to your dress, you always look well in white, and to-day I think it suits you better than usual."

"Papa, that is scant praise; I shall expect Kenneth to pay me a higher compliment."

The old man played with her golden curls, as, seated on a low stool at his feet, she glanced smilingly at him.

"Kenneth Carew may consider himself a lucky man, my child," her father said, "for this day he will win the fairest bride in the whole State, who brings him not only youth and beauty, but a loving heart and wealth such as many a duke could not afford to give his daughter."

"I wish, papa, you had not spoken of money among my advantages," said Lilian, with a vexed look; "I like to think that Kenneth chooses me for myself alone."

"Be sure that he loves you, pet, for mortal man could scarcely be indifferent to such attractions as you possess. Still, as a man of the world, he must feel that the Carew coffers will be replenished with the Merriton gold, and that knowledge can but add to his satisfaction in making the alliance."

"If I were an empress," she said, very softly, "and he one of my lowest subjects, I would still select him for my lord and love."

"A very pretty sentiment," smiled her father. "Rather too romantic, perhaps, for a plain man of business like myself, but suitable to a young lady on her wedding morning. It is fortunate, since young Carew is so irresistible, that he has inherited the Carew property, for I should have grieved to be obliged to thwart my Lilian's fancy."

"If his brother, Everard, had lived it would not have prevented our marriage," she answered, innocently. "You say, papa, that my fortune is large; it would have sufficed for all our wants."

"You are not ambitious, Lilian, but I should have taken upon myself the responsibility of deciding the question. I would not barter my child for wealth and position; many a man might look for a son-in-law higher in the social scale than Kenneth Carew; but I could not have permitted you to sacrifice your prospects entirely to girlish romance, and Kenneth well knows that had he simply inherited the few thousands his father originally intended leaving him, it would have been mad presumption to aspire to your hand."

Her countenance became overshadowed. It seemed treason against love to suppose that such mundane considerations should separate two kindred hearts.

"I don't know how we got upon this topic," observed Mr. Merriton. "Come, Lilian, our guests will be soon arriving, and it will be time to hurry off to church, if the knot is to be tied this morning. So kiss me, my dear, and take my fondest blessing and best wishes before you leave me to complete your toilet."

He laid his hand upon the bright curls as she reverently bowed her head, and murmured a few words that came from his inmost heart.

The wedding was to be quietly celebrated at the church Lilian attended. Mr. Merriton would have had all the pomp and parade which the ceremonial permitted—a train of gorgeous equipages, a crowd of ushers, each bearing a huge bouquet in his button-hole, white satin favors, and a perfect bevy of elegantly-attired bridesmaids; but Kenneth and Lilian successfully resisted his desire, being simple in their tastes, and averse to making the most solemn act in their lives a reason for extravagant display or a spectacle to ex-

cite the curiosity of half the town. Yet the populace had turned out in full force to see the marriage; and as Kenneth, in defiance of general usage, stood in the church porch awaiting his bride, he felt himself to be "the observed of all observers," and was proportionately embarrassed and uncomfortable.

Soon the eagerly-expected carriage drove up to the gate. He could see the drooping, blushing face, half-hidden by the veil, and was more than repaid for the long period of probation during which he had suffered the anguish of hopeless love. A few short sentences would presently unite him for life to Lilian!

Down the narrow path she came, leaning on her father's arm, fair as the flower whose name so nearly resembled her own, her trailing garment rustling gently as she advanced toward him.

At that moment a general movement and confusion became apparent in the rear of the crowd; murmurs of admiration died away or were lost in the hum of rising voices; every eye was turned from Lilian to gaze on a haggard, frenzied woman, with disheveled hair and blood-stained hands and dress.

Gesticulating wildly, she made her way through the throng, and flung herself between the bride and bridegroom.

"I am not, then, too late!" she shrieked, in hoarse tones. "Lilian Merriton must not be sacrificed by marrying this man! Kenneth Carew, I denounce you as the assassin of your brother!"

"This woman must be an escaped lunatic," cried Mr. Merriton, impatiently. "Take her away!"

Half a dozen brawny hands seized Beatrice, who struggled in their grasp.

"I am not mad," she cried, "though to have left him lying cold and still might well have turned a loving woman's brain. Yet strength will be given me to avenge his death, and then it matters little whether life or reason leave me."

"It is Miss Thornton," said Kenneth, recognizing her in some surprise so altered was she in appearance and demeanor. "Unloose your hold, my men, and let her speak. What can you mean by making this wild accusation?" he demanded, turning to the half-maddened girl. "My brother Everard died long since in South America."

"No, no," she interrupted; "he was alive only a few hours ago. See, here is his precious letter, received but yesterday! Cannot you imagine the joy with which I set forth to meet him? Yet ere I arrived at our trysting-tree I found him stricken to the earth. It was your hand that did the deed, for the sake of that pale-faced girl, who must be your wife, even at the cost of a brother's life!"

"This letter is certainly in Everard's handwriting," said Kenneth, visibly agitated as he glanced at the extended missive. "We must inquire into the matter, and ascertain whether Miss Thornton has any foundation for her extraordinary assertions."

"There can be no wedding to-day," said Mr. Merriton, with authority. "Lilian, my love, let me take you to the carriage. We must return home."

But before yielding to her father's request she approached Kenneth, and whispered in his ear, "Whatever trouble may be in store, I shall always both love and trust you."

Her words gave him comfort, though he made no answer; indeed, in his mental confusion all power of coherent speech had for the time departed. Sadly he watched the carriage containing Lilian and her father drive rapidly away.

Meanwhile, a party of gentlemen prepared to obey the directions of Beatrice by making search for the body; others, dispersing into different groups, marveled at the strange event which had prevented the marriage, and hinted at the possibility of Kenneth's guilt.

The inquest upon the body found at Hawthorn Lane was held at the Union House when

all kinds of conflicting evidence was given. There were doubts as to the identity of the deceased; but the stature and general contour of the figure, the color of the hair, the ring upon his finger, and the name of "Everard Carew" marked on sundry articles of clothing, were held to establish the fact, and it was conceded by most people that the murdered man was no other than Claude Carew's eldest son. The evidence of Beatrice was heard with great interest. Her love and despair moved the coldest heart. Many, too, looked suspiciously on Kenneth, as, notwithstanding all warning, she persisted in asserting that he only derived benefit from his brother's death.

"He denied having received a letter," she said, "though Everard must have written; and could offer no proof as to where he had passed the hours on that eventful evening. If he were really walking in the grounds, smoking a cigar, after dinner, it was strange that none of the household should have seen him, and bear witness in his favor."

Madcap Everard had given no address in the missive dispatched to Beatrice. The most experienced detectives failed to find a clew to his New York lodgings, and the whole affair was evidently enshrouded in the deepest mystery. Those cruel blows upon the face must have been made by some blunt instrument—the knob of a heavy stick, or the butt-end of a pistol.

The work had been effectually completed, and even Beatrice could distinguish no trace of the lineaments which were engraved on her memory.

It was hard upon Kenneth Carew that this impassioned and high-spirited girl implicitly believed him to be guilty. Her thrilling words carried conviction to many who would otherwise never have harbored the least suspicion that he could be involved in such a crime. Dark surmises were whispered, old scandals long sunk into obscurity brought again to light, and Everard was represented as the life-long victim of a father's unnatural aversion and a brother's greed.

On the day of the funeral, when Kenneth, as chief mourner, attended the grand obsequies which marked the important fact that another Carew was deposited in the family vault, black looks were bent upon him, and several ill-conditioned townsmen audibly vented their indignation. In short, popular feeling was not in his favor; and though he bore himself proudly, he was none the less conscious that by many he was deemed a criminal who sooner or later would meet his just deserts.

Still, no important evidence was forthcoming to enable the magistrates to issue a warrant for his apprehension; and, after many delays, the coroner returned his verdict—"Willful murder against some person or persons unknown."

The next morning Mr. Merriton paid a visit to Fairview. The old gentleman had kept somewhat aloof since the day of the interrupted wedding, and now Kenneth noticed that his greeting was stiff and constrained, while he had the air of one about to perform an unpleasant duty. Too well the young man anticipated the nature of the misfortune which was about to befall him.

"I trust Lilian is better, Mr. Merriton," he remarked, when they were seated. "I was grieved to hear that she had been unwell."

"Thank you, Mr. Carew. The doctor assures me there is no cause for alarm. Her suffering has been mental rather than bodily, nor can we be surprised when we remember the shock which her nerves experienced on that fearful morning."

"For her sake even more than my own I regretted that she should have been subjected to such an ordeal. We have both been severely tried; may we hope that the future will bring compensation for the past?"

He uttered the words deprecatingly—almost interrogatively. Though no coward, his heart sunk before the determined aspect of Lilian's father.

"After what has happened, you can scarcely expect my daughter to share that future!" he observed, coldly. "A public disgrace has been thrown upon us both; we have been made the talk of the land; her name must no longer be linked with yours!"

"You would separate us, then, though we love each other, and for no fault of mine?"

"The match never met with my entire approval," said Mr. Merriton, evading the question. "Lilian is greatly admired, and if she had not been willful and blind to the duties of her position, might have made a very different match. She preferred to accept your proposal. I would not thwart her wishes, for the Carews bore an honorable name and were respected throughout the State. It is very different now."

Kenneth's bronzed cheek flushed to a crimson hue.

"I understand you," he said; "but you might have spared me that taunt. If the ravings of a frantic girl have prejudiced me in your esteem, and our long acquaintance has given you no faith in my integrity, it is well that the semblance of friendship should cease between us, even if I sacrifice my hope of being your daughter's husband."

"Do not take offense too hastily, Kenneth," stammered Mr. Merriton, somewhat abashed. "Of course I know that Beatrice Thornton's accusation is not true."

"You may be excused for feeling doubtful," was the bitter answer, "since there are many who are ready to condemn me unheard! I would rather have been arrested and tried for my life, than hear the covert innuendoes breathed by malicious tongues. But unless the real assassin is discovered, it would be difficult to prove my entire innocence; and every one will whisper a suspicion that my hands are imbrued in a brother's blood."

"It is strange that the police make no discovery. I hear you have offered a reward for—"

"Five thousand dollars. If it were needful, I would give my entire fortune to stand clear in the sight of my fellow-men without this shadow on my name."

There was a long silence. Kenneth was struggling for composure, and Mr. Merriton scarcely knew what to say.

"Do me the justice to believe," began the former after awhile, "that I had no intention of asking Lilian to fulfill her promise while these cruel rumors were afloat. I trusted she would not misjudge me, but patiently wait until some fortunate chance enabled me to refute all calumny. Is she aware of this visit?" he asked, suddenly.

Mr. Merriton confessed that he had not mentioned his intention.

"She is so fragile and sensitive, it would only have distressed her. But my duty is to watch over her welfare, Kenneth, so that she may never reproach me with a want of paternal care."

"If she were my wife," answered Kenneth, dryly, "I would give her no reason to blame you for having consented to our union. But I do not wish to urge my claims upon you, or speak of that love which would have striven to make her happy. At your desire I release your daughter from her engagement. It is fortunate that Beatrice Thornton did not arrive a few minutes later; you might not have found it so easy to separate us."

Mr. Merriton mumbled a few words expressive of his sorrow at being forced to act discourteously toward the son of his old friend, pleading in excuse his fatherly anxiety for an only child.

Kenneth scarcely heard his apology; he was striving to realize the bitter truth that his bride, so nearly won, was lost, perhaps, forever.

When his visitor had departed, he roved restlessly about the house, sore at heart, yet striving bravely to hide his suffering even from his own sight.

At last he entered the suite of rooms which

had been fitted up for the use of the expected mistress of Fairview. Delicate draperies, luxurious furniture, exquisite paintings and statuettes were everywhere.

There was the low easy-chair, placed in close juxtaposition to the satin-lined work-table, the piano which had been so carefully selected, the books and ornaments specially chosen to suit Lilian's taste.

He hurriedly quitted the apartments, locking each room through which he passed, and retaining possession of the keys.

"No one shall enter them but Lilian," said he, "as my wife. If that she should never be, they shall remain in silence and abandonment, at least until I, the last of the Carews, am carried forth to fill my niche in the family vault."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARGAIN BETWEEN THEM.

"AND must he, then, escape all punishment? Poor, weak woman that I am, who vowed to avenge Everard's death, and find myself powerless to effect my most ardent desire! Oh, if I were a man!"

The speaker was Beatrice Thornton, who had just been made acquainted with the result of the inquest by Jerome Maxwell.

He watched her attentively, as she paced up and down the small room like some creature from the wilds that pants for freedom, and answered her quietly, "It is doubtful whether man or woman could bring sufficient evidence to convict Kenneth Carew of causing his brother's death. What reason have you for assuming him to be guilty, Beatrice?"

"More than enough to satisfy my own mind. Does he not deny having received Everard's letter? Was he not absent from home at the hour when the crime was committed? For years he may have been Everard's foe, supplanting him in his father's favor, finally robbing him of life."

"Your suspicions will not affect him," said Jerome, quietly and calmly. "Besides, as you truly say, a woman can do so little. It would require an experienced man of the world, a subtle lawyer, shrewd in penetrating the mysteries of crime, with the detective's instinct for finding and following the faintest clew, to bring Kenneth Carew to trial."

Beatrice Thornton's eyes flashed brightly.

"You believe him guilty," she cried; "your tone and manner imply as much."

"Even to you I would rather not give a strong opinion on the subject. Something might be done by one whose heart was in his task to unravel this dark mystery. But it would cost money, time, and trouble, and, above all, could not be attempted by a woman."

"Oh, Jerome, let me try. You know not how love sharpens a woman's faculties, and braces her to encounter storms from which her nature well might shrink."

"My dear Beatrice, I have the strongest admiration for your quick-witted and devoted sex. Still, there are intricacies of the law with which no female mind could cope, and I dare not take the responsibility of advising you to involve yourself in its mazes."

She ceased her rapid walking to and fro, drew near him, and stood for a moment pondering deeply.

"A man of the world—a subtle lawyer, shrewd, clever," she murmured. "Why, Jerome Maxwell, you have sketched yourself. Will you earn my life-long gratitude by making it clear from whom Everard Carew met his death?"

"You ask too much," he returned, with an air of gentle reproach. "Beatrice, you know how tenderly I have loved you; can you not guess my sorrow at finding, as I have done lately, that your heart was occupied with one image, to the exclusion of all others?"

"We are friends, and friends only," she replied. "Long ago that bond was made between us."

"At your desire, yes. Yet it is difficult to

believe that a deep affection will not in time be reciprocated, if she who has inspired it is heart-whole. I was content to wait with patience, knowing not your priceless love had been already won."

"But now, Jerome, you are no longer in ignorance. Therefore, as all question of marriage between us is over, you will surely keep your promise, and serve me as a brother."

The selfishness of love prompted the demand. In truth, the girl was nearly frenzied by this new sorrow, and hardly realized that Jerome might well hesitate before undertaking the cause of his deceased rival. They gazed on one another for awhile in silence—she with the pleading looks of a woman who sues for favor; he with the cunning of a man who sees that his adversary in the game of fate is unwittingly dealing him the best cards. Boldly, at length, his resolve was taken.

"Beatrice," he said, "I will do all you wish. My energies shall be devoted to the task you have at heart; but you must promise to give me a reward."

"How can I ever thank you? My esteem, my heartfelt gratitude, shall be yours."

"Dearly though they would be prized, I cannot deem them fitting recompense for such devotion as I shall show. Do you understand me, Beatrice? You must promise to be my wife."

"Your wife?" she repeated, incredulously. "I, whose every thought of love is buried in Everard's grave?"

"A man cannot be jealous of the dead. He will in time be forgotten, or remembered only as a dream of your thoughtless youth. When I have brought his assassin to justice, your mind will grow calmer by degrees. A peaceful life by the domestic hearth would have its sunny side, and the gratitude you have promised would ripen into wifely duty and affection."

"Never! never!" she cried, energetically. "The marriage tie would be desecrated by our union. My heart is crushed and broken; the blossoms of its love cannot burst forth into new life; and you would weary of my pallid face that never brightened into smiles, but bore the impress always of a sorrow with which you had no sympathy. In time you might come to hate me."

"Beatrice, that could not be. I have always been your devoted slave, thankful for the slightest semblance of friendly regard, feeling my heart throb higher at a word of kindness. Such love is entwined with my life; no coldness could chill or estrange it. To know you were my own, that no living man could come between us, to teach you that there was consolation for past suffering in the dawn of other hopes, would be felicity to me."

"My hopes are perished, and I have nothing left to live for," she returned, "save the one great desire for vengeance on Everard's assassin."

"He shall be brought to justice if you will employ my skill and energy to work out your desire. Inspired by the longing to deserve your approval, undaunted by opposition, determined to succeed at any cost, you shall have reason to confess that your husband has fulfilled his share of the compact."

"Let us speak no more on the subject of a marriage to which I could never consent," she said, with a shudder; "but tell me what must now be done to attain our end."

"You refuse to grant the terms on which alone I can proffer my assistance," was the cold reply. "I decline to give further counsel."

"For pity's sake, Jerome, do not leave me in my misery. If you only knew how my heart-strings have been wrung by a fatal passion frowned on by fortune from its earliest dawn, you would have more compassion."

Her slender fingers clasped his arm entreatingly, and he could see heavy tears standing on her long, dark lashes; yet his purpose never faltered, or only gathered fresh resolution from the sight of beauty which sorrow heightened rather than decreased.

"If you would have me believe in your faith and love to him who has been taken from you, accept my hand, and view me as his possible avenger. Reject me, and I leave your presence; nor will I trouble you again."

Beatrice sunk upon a couch. She knew that further entreaties would be vain.

"Shall I go?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Farewell, then, Beatrice Thornton! I leave you to your weak regrets and fruitless schemes. One day you may repent the result of this interview."

He had already passed the threshold, when she called him back. His crafty visage glowed with exultation as he obeyed her summons.

"Have you anything more to say?" he asked, quietly.

All traces of emotion had vanished from her countenance, as, standing erect before him, she answered: "Mr. Maxwell, I have resolved to devote myself to the furtherance of that special purpose which has engrossed my every thought! I expect to find in you an able coadjutor, therefore I accept your terms."

"Then you will be my wife?"

"Since you insist upon that condition, I have no alternative but to agree."

"You are very cruel, Beatrice, to grant the boon so unwillingly! Still, you have consented to be mine, and for that I am grateful."

"Love is not in the bond. Remember, Jerome, it is a bargain between us; I give my hand as the price of your services!"

"That is understood. And now, my fair betrothed, we will seal the compact!"

A shudder passed through her frame as his lips touched her cheek, and Bridget's opportune entrance at the moment gave her a fair excuse for escaping further unwelcome caresses.

The good woman's penetration enabled her to perceive that she had interrupted no ordinary conference; and as she glanced inquiringly from one to the other, Jerome cried, exultingly: "Congratulate us, Bridget! The long-deferred wedding is to take place at last! Miss Thornton consents to recompense my constancy!"

His noisy triumph jarred on the sensitive nerves of the reluctant bride-elect, and as she tottered rather than walked from the room after bidding Jerome a brief adieu, it seemed to her that to have offered up her life for Everard's sake would have been a comparatively light sacrifice to that which was now exacted by his former rival.

Yet she did not falter in her purpose; indeed, not much time was afforded for reflection. Jerome urged a speedy union, and she promised it with a readiness he would have considered flattering had she not openly avowed the reason for her compliance.

"It will be less difficult to trace the links of evidence if you commence your task without delay," she remarked; "therefore I am quite willing to keep my promise, trusting you will then honorably fulfill your share of the compact."

Jerome was obliged to express his satisfaction, though there was a gleam in his eyes that boded ill for the felicity of his future wife.

There were few preparations for the wedding, and these mainly owing to Bridget's remonstrances and personal exertions. Beatrice would have gone to the altar in her plain black dress and crape bonnet, without giving a thought to the incongruity of the proceeding, had not her humble friend zealously interposed.

"Miss Beatrice, the likes was never heard of a bride wearing mourning on her wedding-day! It would be quite a scandal; and I have my doubts as to whether the ceremony would be legal! You must wear a white gown if it is only a common muslin; but as everything is to be plain and quiet, I have been thinking if flowers in your hair would look out of place; though really—"

"Dress me as you please," cried Beatrice,

impatiently, "so long as I am not troubled by hearing long arguments upon a subject so uninteresting."

"Uninteresting!"

Bridget could only hold up her hands in amazement, then walk away, shaking her head despondingly.

One dull November morning, when earth and sky were shrouded in vapor, and winter had already commenced, Jerome Maxwell and Beatrice Thornton plighted their ill-omened vows.

Never was a bridal more void of all semblance of gladness. Even the bridegroom looked abashed and ill at ease; while Bridget (the only substitute for the usual attendants upon the white-robed bride) sobbed audibly throughout the ceremony, and indulged in hysterical vehemence of grief when called upon to sign her name in the vestry, for with the penetration given by affection she foreboded that such nuptials could never insure happiness. As for Beatrice, her eyes were gleaming with a fire that almost suggested the fever of insanity; the hue of her cheeks alternated from a hectic flush to deadly pallor; her rigid lips seemed barely able to pronounce the words dictated by the minister.

Yet all proceeded in due order; the irrevocable pledges were taken; Jerome had gained the prize so long vainly sought—Beatrice was his wife!

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT SHE DISCOVERED.

KENNETH CAREW walked through the leafless woods, his gun upon his shoulder, his dogs following well at heel. The day was clear and frosty, the sunshine fast dispersing the icicles hanging from the long bare boughs which sometimes almost formed a canopy above his head as he pursued his way.

Suddenly he met her who was ever in his thoughts; although, as he now shunned all society, they had never met since the day when their intended union was so abruptly stayed.

How pensive and fragile, yet surpassingly fair, Lillian Merriton looked in her becoming dress of black velvet and sable!

Yet, though love surged tumultuously through every fiber of his heart, pride forbade its outward manifestation, and he would have passed her with a mere formal recognition had she not extended her hand, meanwhile raising to his two soft blue eyes, with just one tear standing in each of their limpid depths.

What lover's displeasure or prudence could resist such influences? Kenneth forgot Mr. Merriton's unfriendly scruples and his own sense of outraged dignity as he clasped the slender fingers of the fair girl before him.

He might—the spot being lonely—have kissed away her rising tears; but the opportune remembrance that he no longer could venture on the privileges of an affianced lover recurred in time to prevent that breach of decorum. He attempted to incase himself in the armor of cool reserve.

"Miss Merriton, I did not expect to meet you here."

"I know, that Kenneth, or you would have walked in another direction. Hitherto you have studiously avoided me, and now accident has thrown us together, you treat me as a stranger."

"I believed I was acting according to your wishes," he stammered.

"My wishes?" she repeated, in genuine astonishment.

"Yes; or at least those of Mr. Merriton."

"There you may be right. My father is obstinate in his prejudices, and I must consent to be guided by him, and trust to time and persuasion. But though for awhile we must submit to be separated, I am still your own little Lillian."

"My own! No; that cannot be! My name is overshadowed; the honor of our house has received a fearful blow. Dark rumors still accuse me of causing my brother's death.

Until they are falsified I dare not claim your love and trust."

"Kenneth, you know how implicitly I believe in your innocence—how much I regret that the breaking off of our engagement has given your slanderers another apparent justification of their calumny."

"People applaud your father's wisdom in not bestowing his daughter upon a suspected man," said Kenneth, bitterly. "I do not doubt that he has reaped golden opinions as to his prudence and integrity throughout his circle of friends."

Lilian was silent for a moment; then whispered timidly, with downcast eyes:

"I wish—oh, how I wish that unhappy girl had arrived but half an hour later with her frantic accusation!"

"You cannot seriously mean, my darling," he cried, his gloomy brow clearing, "that you would not have regretted to find your fate linked with mine, or to share the shame which has fallen upon me?"

"I wish that I might have taken my rightful place by your side, to cheer you in the hours of depression produced by unmerited obloquy—to show by my devotion that I believed you incapable of crime—to help you to live down scandal, and win back confidence and regard! Had I been your wife, my father could not have sundered us; there could have been no conflict between love and duty!"

It is doubtful what rapturous answer Kenneth might have made to this sweet confession; for, as the last words hovered on her lips, a cry of wild alarm in a female voice rung out upon the air, and startled both the lovers.

"Hark! what is that?" cried Lillian, clinging to the young man's arm, as she looked around apprehensively.

"Some one, I fear, who is in distress or danger. I must hasten in the direction whence the sound proceeded."

"And I will accompany you," said Lillian.

Together they hurried down a secluded path leading into the deeper recesses of the wood, until they came to a small open space surrounded by ancient trees.

Kneeling on the cold earth, her arms outstretched as if to clasp some fast-receding form, was Beatrice Maxwell.

Lilian, impelled by womanly sympathy, advanced toward her, after warning Kenneth to keep out of sight, as his presence would only irritate the unhappy girl, concerning whose sanity she had grave doubts.

"Did you see him?" inquired Beatrice, in the low accents of suppressed emotion, as Miss Merriton bent over her. "But no," she continued; "why do I question so vainly? It is to me alone his spirit would appear to chide the tardy fulfillment of my vow of vengeance. And yet have I not sacrificed and suffered in order to perform that solemn pledge? So, Everard, why look so reproachfully on me? I cannot bear that stern, unearthly gaze!"

"Your fancy has deceived you," said Lillian, soothingly. "Everard is at rest; the sins and sorrows of this world can trouble him no more."

"You think so because they have laid his body in the family vault with funeral pomp. But his spirit wanders still. I saw his mortal semblance standing there—just under the arch formed by those knotted boughs. Terrible was the reproach in his stony glance; and, oh, it is well-deserved, for three long months have nearly passed away, and my work remains undone!"

She rose, and with trembling hands gathered her mantle around her.

"You are ill, Mrs. Maxwell," Lillian said. "Stay no longer here, but return home. Your husband will be alarmed at your absence."

"Yes, I will go to Jerome and tell him of my vision; he must help me now."

She glided away amid the trees, leaving Lillian to rejoin Kenneth and exchange a few more words breathing affectionate confidence before they separated, uncertain when kindly fortune might once more reunite them.

The lamp was just lighted in the parlor at The Hermitage when Beatrice entered, but the old room, with its dark panels, heavy furniture, and faded hangings, looked far from cheerful.

Jerome sat beside a small table drawn near the hearth, upon which were some cigarettes and a bottle marked "Eau-de-vie," for even at that comparatively early hour the lawyer had been enjoying sundry strong potations.

Certainly those few short weeks of wedlock did not appear to have conduced to the improvement of Jerome's looks or serenity of temper. His forehead was marked with lines of care, his brows were knitted over his sunken eyes, his voice was harsh and sharp as he addressed his young wife.

"Where have you been gadding this afternoon? You are never at home. I have told you before that I would not allow these solitary strolls."

"I have been in the wood, Jerome," she said, almost humbly. "My head ached so badly I thought the air might do me good. I did not think you would be home so early."

"I am a fool for my pains, when I know well enough my wife would rather I stayed away. Most women have a smile of welcome when a husband returns laden with business cares and longing for a word of kindly attention. But you—"

"I warned you, Jerome," she returned, in trembling tones, "that you must not expect to find me the same as happier wives whose hearts have not been crushed and broken by the troubles of their girlhood. Surely you remember the bargain between us? You knew my hopes were buried in the grave. I never deceived you by one flattering falsehood, but you were content to take me as I was."

"Perhaps I overrated my powers of forbearance. Anyhow, your disobedience to my express commands and indifference to my interests are sufficient motives for estrangement."

"Have patience with me," she answered, pressing her hands upon her throbbing heart; "perhaps in time I may more resemble what you wish. At least, I will attempt to perform my duty, if you do not neglect to keep your promise."

"I do not understand to what you allude," he said, roughly, without turning his head. "You women love to speak in riddles."

"Jerome!" The man's audacity almost struck her dumb, but she struggled against the tempest of passion which caused her every vein to tingle, and replied in a tone of assumed composure: "You cannot have forgotten your promise to endeavor to unravel the mystery surrounding Everard Carew's death. Oh, Jerome," she continued, more vehemently, "I saw him but an hour ago; his pleading look seemed to ask for vengeance on his destroyer. His unquiet spirit cannot rest; it will haunt me till justice has been done. And you, my husband, will aid me to perform my vow!"

"I believe you have lost your senses," he cried, angrily, "to imagine I should play the part of a private detective in order to gratify your caprice. Young Carew is out of my way; there let the matter rest. Even your simplicity can scarcely expect me to mourn his loss."

"Then you have broken your word," she said slowly, as if not able yet to realize how cruelly she had been duped. "You have broken your word, Jerome Maxwell, and I—most miserable of women—have sacrificed myself in vain."

"You are pleased to be complimentary," he sneered; "though I, too, deserve some pity for having linked myself to a woman whose every thought is for a dead lover. However, I vowed that you should be mine in spite of all intervening obstacles, and now that we thoroughly understand each other, I warn you that I will tame your proud spirit. If you cannot love, you shall learn to fear me."

He raised his hand with a menacing gesture almost as if about to strike her. He was maddened by the cool contempt expressed in every

lineament as, with the haughty mien of an empress, she quitted the room.

Beatrice resolved that very hour to tell Jerome she could no longer regard him as her husband; he had himself broken the tie between them. If he refused to free her—and she had vague ideas that he had legal power over her—death would be welcomed rather than his loathed society.

Wildly she thought of the cool, clear river by whose banks she had wandered in childhood; might she not rest beneath its rippling waves? Or— She paused; it flashed across her mind that the pistol which her father during his lifetime had kept close at hand in his dread of burglars was probably still in the second drawer of the oaken bureau.

The old piece of furniture had been banished to the lumber-room when Jerome took possession of the house and slightly modernized its arrangements. But Beatrice, in her restless and despairing state of mind, resolved to satisfy herself without delay that she had the means of deliverance should her husband enforce his claims or take measures to prevent her quitting his protection.

In her madness, for it was little less, she fully recollected the magnitude of the crime of self-destruction, though a natural feeling of horror made her shudder at the thought.

"I will find the pistol, but use it only in the last extremity," she murmured, as she lighted a small lamp that always stood on a table in her chamber ready for use, and prepared to mount the narrow, steep stairs leading to the garret.

In a few seconds she had entered the room. The oaken bureau stood in a dark corner. She made her way toward it, and attempted to open the drawer containing the weapon. It was locked, but in her father's time a duplicate key had been manufactured for her special use, and to this she now resorted. At first the drawer seemed empty, save for a few old packets of dusty papers, but plunging her hand into its furthest recesses, she drew forth the object of her search.

And not that only. A dark blue ribbon was entangled round it, from which hung suspended a portrait of herself, executed years ago by a traveling artist, and given to Everard; also the half gold piece that had been their first love-token.

She stood gazing on them, appalled at the unexpected revelation. The ribbon was stiffened and stained by blood, and an examination showed that the butt-end of the pistol had been put to a terrible use, of which it still bore traces.

Thoughts of her lover as she saw him last, defaced beyond the semblance of humanity, a remembrance of his oft-repeated promise never to part with her gifts while life remained, aided her to solve the mystery.

Not Kenneth Carew, but her husband, Jerome Maxwell, had committed that murder near the trysting-tree.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

BEATRICE was ill for weeks after her fatal discovery; but at length strength came back to her feeble limbs, full consciousness to her bewildered brain, and once more she was forced to take up the burden of existence.

Jerome she seldom saw, for she became so perceptibly worse when, at the beginning of her illness, he approached her bedside, that the medical attendant advised him to discontinue his visits to her room.

"It is a frequent phase in nervous disorders that the patient becomes unduly excited by the presence of one whose influence during ordinary health would be most soothing and beneficial," remarked the polite practitioner. And Jerome took the hint.

Did he suspect that his wife knew aught that he was anxious to conceal? Was he at all aware that his secret had been discovered on that fatal evening? She had mechanically replaced the proofs of his guilt in their former

receptacle before falling into the swoon in which she had been found by Bridget. But the key had remained in the lock of the bureau, and when summoned to assist in conveying her back to her own apartment, he had guessed the reason of her sudden seizure. Then, in her delirium, she uttered wild, incoherent sentences which appeared merely insane ravings to those around her; but he found in them a meaning that confirmed his suspicions.

Day by day he grew more morose and gloomy, drowning reflection in copious libations, haunted by the fear that his sin would find him out; though, even at the worst, he knew his wife's evidence could not be used against him. Yet if justice once were set upon the track, the hidden truth might be brought to light, for Kenneth Carew would spare no trouble or expense to vindicate himself from all injurious doubts.

Jerome could not trust Beatrice. She had never loved him; now she must hate him; and he began to consider how her tongue might be stopped before it began to work mischief. His former passion was effectually quenched. He was a man who felt proud of conquering difficulties, and had been fascinated by the excitement of pursuing an object seemingly unattainable. At all hazards he had struggled to gain his prize; but, after all, had it been worth the winning? A faded, melancholy woman, who made no pretense of caring to preserve his affection, and had committed the unpardonable sin of finding him out. It was necessary to sacrifice her in order to secure his own safety, and an expedient soon occurred to his mind which would remove her from his path, and render her harmless, if, prompted by malice she should utter a word in his disparagement.

One morning, when Beatrice was convalescent, and lying on her couch beside the window basking in the rays of the early spring sunshine, Bridget entered the room, her face crimson with indignation, and her whole demeanor betraying inward perturbation. Suddenly she burst into a torrent of tears, and falling on her knees beside the invalid, embraced her with transports of grief.

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, my poor dear girl, whom I have loved and tended so many years, it is cruel to think of taking you from me! Oh, my darling, when they come, show them that you are no loonatick, but have as much right to enjoy your blessed freedom as the best of them doctors, who make a good living out of other folks' misfortunes."

Beatrice started from her recumbent posture.

"What do you mean, Bridget? My only real friend, say if any danger threatens me!"

"Miss Beatrice,"—it is to be remembered that in times of strong emotion Bridget invariably forgot to address her mistress as Mrs. Maxwell—"Miss Beatrice, my darling, it was wrong and mean of me, I know, to listen at the door of master's study. But when them doctors came, I knew they had been sent for to consult with about you, and Mr. Maxwell's manner has been strange lately; so I could not resist the temptation, and I heard them say— But no, no; I must not tell you; it is a wicked falsehood!"

"They said I was mad, and must be confined in an asylum!" cried Beatrice. "Do not seek to spare me, only tell the truth."

Bridget, between her sobs, acknowledged that "the wretches had dared to insinuate" that for her own sake Mrs. Maxwell should be placed under restraint.

"But it was your husband's fault, my poor child," she continued. "He told no end of lies about you, though he pretended to be as grieved as could be. What have you done, Miss Beatrice, to turn him so against you? I'm sure he loved you once."

"He believes himself to be in my power," murmured the young wife. "Perhaps he fears that I may publicly denounce him. He might have trusted—I do not say my affection, but the tie that exists between us."

"The doctors are coming to see you to-morrow," resumed Bridget.

"I will not stay here to await their visit. Who knows what influence Jerome Maxwell may bring to bear against me? We will go forth together, Bridget, you and I. I am willing to suffer privation or peril—anything, rather than stay longer in this house."

"But you are only just recovering from illness; you have kept your room for weeks!" remonstrated the domestic.

"That matters nothing. This roof can shelter me no more. I must escape before I am robbed of my liberty, and doomed to linger out my days in solitude, or the society of the mentally afflicted. You do not intend to forsake me, Bridget, in this crisis of my fate?"

She had risen from her couch, and was already eager to prepare for flight.

"Think what you are about to do!" Bridget entreated. "We cannot travel without money, nor live without daily bread. My little savings were spent long ago, and you, Miss Beatrice—"

She stopped, fearing to wound her favorite's pride; but well she knew that lavish generosity toward his bride had not been one of Jerome Maxwell's foibles.

"I would rather starve than risk the loss of freedom!" cried Beatrice, passionately. "There is money enough in my purse to take us away from Madison, and I have a few old trinkets and my father's gold repeater, which I must part with to afford us the means of subsistence until I am strong enough to work. But, Bridget, I will not urge you to venture if your courage fails."

"I only fear for you, Miss Beatrice. Often and often in my early days I've been brought face to face with want, yet managed somehow to tide things over without being much the worse; but you are different, and in your weak health need every comfort. I feel as if it would break my heart to see you suffer."

"Remember, dear old Bridget, how wretched I should be immured in prison—for so would an asylum appear to me—and separated from you, my only friend. Do not attempt to combat my resolution, but rather assist in making preparations for my escape from such a doom."

Throughout the remainder of the day Bridget busied herself at intervals in packing a small black valise with as many necessities as she could induce it to hold, while Beatrice sat near the window, impatiently watching for evening shadows to steal over the landscape.

She longed to bid a final farewell to the scene of her brief and miserable wedded life. Her vow must be broken, and Everard's death pass unavenged; for the fetters she had voluntarily assumed forbade all hope of justice being awarded to his destroyer.

It wanted scarcely half an hour to midnight, the servants were sitting over their supper in the kitchen, Jerome was drinking brandy and water, and smoking his choicest cigars in the retirement of his study, when two women, cloaked and veiled, left The Hermitage, and took the nearest way toward the railway-station.

Perhaps both remembered that night far away in the vanished past when Beatrice had quitted her father's house to unite her fate with that of Everard Carew's, and had returned oppressed with disappointment and shame, abandoned by the lover to whom she had confided her happiness.

In somber silence they proceeded, Bridget supporting the often-failing steps of her companion, until the welcome light gleaming through the darkness revived their drooping spirits, and told them that they had reached the station.

The night train for New York was momentarily expected, and as it dashed into the station her heart grew lighter, and escaping from the bustle caused by running brakemen and belated passengers, she hurried into a car, followed by her attendant, feeling that at present all difficulties had been surmounted.

They were already gliding away from the station when a tall man was seen hastening to reach the departing train and roughly pushing aside all obstacles that threatened to arrest his progress.

With a thrill of terror, Beatrice recognized her husband, and drew back to the further corner of the seat, scarcely daring to hope she might escape his scrutiny. Her flight from home was discovered, and he had followed her, so she supposed, or perhaps mere suspicion had directed his steps to the station.

But now the engine puffed and panted as it resumed its journey. No one had attempted to molest her; and recalling the look of baffled rage imprinted on Jerome's face, she ventured to hope that she had started unseen, and that her husband might prosecute his search in other quarters.

As the time wore away fatigue overpowered her; her head drooped upon Bridget's shoulder, and she fell into a troubled sleep, haunted by dreams that brought back the terrible scenes through which she had lately passed.

She woke with a start, scarcely knowing where she was, so much the real was mingling with the ideal of her visions; for Bridget's arms were thrown around her in an access of alarm, the whistle of the engine emitted a series of shrieks, the car was swaying violently from side to side.

Then came a crash and rapid descent, amid the noise of breaking wood-work and the screams of affrighted passengers. The engine and several cars were off the track and rolling down a steep embankment.

Stunned and bewildered, Beatrice lay amid the wreck. She heard Bridget's loud moans, and felt the presence of her clinging arms; but all was dark around them.

She was herself bruised and shaken, though not otherwise injured, for a portion of the broken carriage formed a support for the rest and prevented a crushing weight falling upon her.

"Are you hurt, Bridget?" she gasped at length.

"My arm is pinned down; I am afraid it's broken. What will become of us, my darling? We shall never be got out alive!"

"Be brave and patient, dear Bridget; some one will come to our deliverance."

The minutes seemed lengthened into hours as they waited for release, sometimes whispering a few words of mutual comfort; more often in the silence of keen expectancy. They could hear the hum of voices, and knew that efforts were being made to extricate them from their perilous position.

At length the wood-work forming their living tomb was partially removed, though with extreme care and caution; and the gray light of dawning day stealing in upon them, gave token that their imprisonment would soon be over.

"Work with a will, my men!" cried a clear, manly voice, "we shall soon release them now!"

Those tones penetrated to the ears of Beatrice, and caused her heart to thrill with mingled ecstasy and awe.

"This must be all a dream," she murmured, "from which I shall awake presently. Only in dreams shall I hear again the voice of Everard Carew!"

A heavy beam was lifted from above, and a face looked down upon her. A cry of ineffable joy issued from her parted lips.

"Everard, have you come at last to take me with you to the spirit-land? Oh, my love, if this is death, it is very sweet to die!"

"Beatrice! Beatrice!"

His soul went out in the words. A giant's strength seemed given him; and he worked with almost supernatural vigor.

The task was completed; and tenderly lifting her in his arms, he bore her away from the wrecked carriage, leaving Bridget to the care of a kindly brakesman, who had assisted in her escape.

CHAPTER XI.

AT LAST.

In the parlor of a vine-wreathed cottage, near the spot where the accident had taken place, Beatrice sat alone. The sunshine streamed in upon her; the waving tendrils of the vine kissed her cheek, as she leaned against the open casement; the birds caroled their choicest lays, to welcome the warm spring day.

Yet all the glow and brightness of nature exerted no soothing influence over her mind. Her thoughts were occupied with her own sorrows. She slowly realized that he whom she had mourned as dead was still alive, and, of course, Jerome had been deeply wronged. At the remembrance of her husband she shook as with an ague.

What would Everard's resurrection bring her save life-long remorse? Her bewildered brain suggested endless questions which it was powerless to answer. Who was the murdered man they had buried in the family vault of the Carews? How had Jerome obtained possession of that blood-stained miniature and love-token? What course must she now pursue? Whom could she consult, with Bridget lying in the room above, too ill and weak for much speech, and no one else to guide her in this difficult crisis?

Her only clearly-defined wish was that she might be sundered from Everard, since it was a sin to renew those vows of love which, in heart, she had never broken.

The door opened; his footstep sounded on the floor as he crossed the small room, and took his station beside her. She did not turn her head; and yet she knew his look was on her with an intensity of affection.

"Why have you come," she cried, in impatient agony, "when you must know that your presence tortures me? But perhaps you may not guess my folly and weakness—how I was tempted to believe you dead, and in that belief—"

"Became the wife of Jerome Maxwell!" he interrupted. "My poor Beatrice, at first I imagined you were false to me, or, at least, had easily forgotten; but one glance at your pale and altered countenance when I saw you weeks ago in the woods convinced me yours was no happy marriage."

"I took you for an apparition," she faltered. "The idea that you were dead was firmly implanted in my mind."

"Yes; I have heard the whole story of my supposed decease from several people, who, firmly believing in 'Madcap' Everard's untimely end, were far too dull to recognize that scapegrace in the bronzed and sedate stranger. There was a mystery which I can partially solve; for I have reason to think that the supposed Everard Carew was no other than my servant, William Smith."

"I cannot understand," she murmured. "The body was found near our trysting-place on the very evening that you had promised to meet me. Your ring was on his hand!"

"I fear the rascal had very ill-defined notions regarding the rights of property, and took possession of many of my belongings to which he had no claim. It was my own fault, however, for taking into my service a vagrant from the streets. But the man's story touched me. It was artfully concocted, and experience had not yet taught me the wisdom of distrusting plausible tales. I sheltered, fed, clothed him, and, like a fool, ventured to suppose I had earned his gratitude. One evening I had been writing to you, Beatrice, and was filled with all sorts of blissful anticipations, when, just as I returned from posting my letter, I was taken suddenly ill. I fancy the fellow had drugged my wine, and, either by accident or design, more than half poisoned me. When I partially recovered consciousness I found out that he had decamped, taking with him, as it afterward appeared, money, clothes, and such articles of value as he could easily appropriate. Among others—saddest loss of all—your

beloved miniature and the broken gold-piece, with which I would not have parted for a kingdom's price!"

He paused. Old memories were crowding across his mind of that passionate love which had blighted his youth, and now, in his mature manhood, revived with all its pristine fire as he found himself again by the side of Beatrice.

"I remained ill for several weeks," he continued; "indeed, at one time, the kindly landlady, who nursed me through the attack, believed I should never rally. But at length my health improved, my mind regained its accustomed tone, and I was about to write to you once more, when I read the announcement of your marriage in one of the daily papers."

"And I was mourning your loss," she sighed, "while you were deeming me cruel and inconstant. Strange as it may appear, it was for your sake that I consented to marry Jerome Maxwell."

Then she told him of her vow, uttered in the first impulse of grief, and the subsequent compact entered into with the wily lawyer.

"You ruined, though unknowingly, the happiness of both our lives," he responded, sadly. "At first I determined to leave America immediately, and become again a wanderer. Then the wish came across me to see you once more, although I believed you had ceased to love me. I journeyed to Madison, kept well out of the way of my brother and former friends, and only indulged myself with an occasional distant glance at you. I was returning to New York quite unconscious that you were a fellow-passenger when the accident happened to the train."

"Then you never informed Kenneth of your arrival in New York?" she inquired, eagerly.

"Never! I abandoned my intention of writing until I had had an interview with you, for my future plans rested upon your decision."

Bitterly she repented her mistake and the irrevocable wrong she had committed in accusing Kenneth. Not even to Everard could she at that moment confess her fault.

"We must part, Everard," she faltered, "for our love has been too deep to dwindle into mere friendship!"

"You send me from you," he said, reproachfully. "You will not permit me the happiness of listening to your voice—of feeling that I am in your presence! Beatrice, do you think I would lure you from your duty? Rather would I watch over you, and even at the cost of many a bitter pang, see you contented in your domestic life!"

"That cannot be!" she interposed, hurriedly. "Of all wives I am most miserable. You add to my troubles; for, while you are near me, I can only remember that my impulsive folly deprived this hour of the felicity which it might have brought us."

"Then I will say farewell," he answered, extending his hand to clasp her burning fingers. "Heaven forbid I should increase the burden you have to bear!"

"May you be happy!" she murmured.

"Is Mrs. Maxwell here?" asked a strange voice at the doorway.

Both Everard and Beatrice started. They had not perceived the man's approach.

He was a rough-headed, apple-faced country bumpkin, having the appearance of a farmer's laborer.

"What do you want with me?" asked Beatrice, perplexed and alarmed at his sudden intrusion, unable to imagine how her identity had been discovered.

"I don't want ye; but missis, that is, Farmer Dashwood's wife, up at Elmwood Farm, said as how ye was to come up quickly if ye wished to see your good man alive."

Could Jerome have been in the train? Impossible! Yet Beatrice remembered the glimpse she had caught of him at the railway station, and was forced to acknowledge that he might have stepped into one of the cars at the further end.

"Am I to go with you?" she asked, tremulously.

"Yes; I will show ye the way. It's not far—just up the lane yonder."

Beatrice withdrew to assume her walking attire, and say a parting word to Bridget, of whom the old dame who owned the cottage which had hospitably given them shelter, took good care.

When she entered the room below, Everard called her aside.

"I have been questioning the man. There seems no doubt that Mr. Maxwell was severely injured in this morning's catastrophe, and was carried to the neighboring farm. Have you courage to see him, Beatrice? It will be a painful sight."

"But one from which I must not shrink. He is my husband, and has sent for me. If he is dying, I shall take my place beside his pillow, and tend to him to the last."

"May I escort you to the farm?"

She made a gesture of refusal, and left the cottage with her guide.

A short walk down the lane brought them to the farm-house, with its many gables and lattice-casements wreathed with Virginia creepers.

The farmer's wife, a comely matron, hurried forth to receive them.

"He is wearying for you to come," she said, "and I feared you might be too late."

"Then there is no hope?" inquired Beatrice.

"The doctors say he cannot live many hours," she replied simply. "His chief injuries are internal. He may go off at any moment, so you must expect the worst, my dear lady."

He lay in a large upper chamber, comfortably furnished with snowy coverlets and draperies.

As Beatrice softly approached, "I hardly expected you would come at my request," he said.

She took her seat by the bedside, inwardly debating whether she should acquaint him with the mistake into which she had fallen respecting the fate of Everard Carew.

"You were quitting your home clandestinely, and I was following to reclaim and take you back, when this wretched accident happened!" he said, in an irritated tone. "Why did you leave me, Beatrice?"

"Because I was warned of your plans for my future welfare," she answered, rather bitterly. "But, Jerome, this is no time for recrimination. We have mutually much to pardon—let there be peace between us."

"Oh, if you had only loved me," he moaned, tossing uneasily on his pillow, "these torments of conscience would not have been mine. In order to win you for my wife, I was tempted, first to treachery, and then to crime. Yet what recompense have my sins brought me?—only remorse, disappointment, and premature death!"

He fell back exhausted, and she hastened to give him a reviving draught, which had been placed in readiness on the small table near the bed.

Presently he spoke again:

"Beatrice, Beatrice, if all the world condemned me, you, at least, should have pity. For you I steeped my soul in guilt—nay, do not shrink, I did not kill your lover, only a cast-off tool of mine who had the audacity to threaten to betray me!"

Then, in disjointed sentences, he poured forth his terrible recital.

"I met him just in the gathering twilight, though I did not recognize him at first; he looked so different to the slouching vagabond I had last seen. He said he was coming to The Hermitage, and that he expected to be well paid for having done me a service. Then he told me Everard Carew had returned, and might have been with you at that moment had he not managed matters cleverly."

"He showed me a ring upon his finger and your portrait (both stolen from his master,) and I was convinced, against my will, that he

spoke the truth. For his fidelity to my interests he claimed an exorbitant reward, and menaced me with exposure if I hesitated to comply with his demands."

"I temporized, expostulated, and finally consented to fetch the money if he would wait at the end of the lane, near the maple trees."

"I knew well enough I had not got it in the house; but I wanted time for reflection. Beatrice, how can I tell you the rest? I remembered there was a pistol in the oaken bureau, and I placed it in my pocket, intending to use it only to intimidate this William Smith if he persisted in annoying me. But the man was obstinate and insolent. Passion overcame me, and, yielding to a sudden impulse, I sprang upon him, and—you know the rest."

He passed his hand across his damp brow, and stared into vacancy, as if in fancy he gazed upon his fallen foe.

"I took your portrait and the broken coin from about his neck," he resumed, "hoping by so doing to prevent any identification of the body. In my agitation I forgot that the fellow boasted he had robbed his master of clothes and jewelry, which, being discovered upon his person, led to the supposition that he was Everard Carey. Afterward I did not regret the mistake, for suspicion pointed at his brother Kenneth, and I was effectually shielded. And now, Beatrice, can you not guess why I have told you this?"

"You wished to ease your mind by confession," she remarked. "It must be awful to lie here with such a sin upon your soul!"

"Yes; but that was not the only reason. I knew what you had found in the old bureau, and gathered from your delirious ravings that you believed me to be the murderer of your lover. I could not rest quietly in the grave, knowing you detested and loathed my memory. If Everard Carew be really dead, it was not through my enmity, and I may even have earned your gratitude by taking vengeance on the man who wronged him."

"I am sincerely repenting my error in having persecuted the innocent while laboring under an insane delusion," she replied. "I speak of Kenneth Carew. Had I not brooded over revenge until I believed myself appointed to bring a villain to justice, both he and Miss Merriton would have escaped undeserved suffering. As for Everard Carew, he is still alive."

Jerome started up, as if endowed with his former vigor.

"You have seen him, then?" he asked.

She assented.

"And have been plighting love-vows while I am dying!" he cried in a paroxysm of furious jealousy. "In life or death that man is ever to come between us!"

"Do not condemn me. I did not forget that I was a wife, not even in the joyful surprise of our reunion. But, Jerome, these things should not disturb you now."

"I know, I know; yet it is hard to feel that I am leaving you to be happy with another. Promise, Beatrice—"

His voice died away; excitement had wrecked the poor remnant of his strength, but the man's selfish and cruel nature was asserting itself to the last.

A glorious summer morning. The flower-crowned earth and cloudless sky seem to rejoice over the happiness of Kenneth Carew and Lillian Merriton, who are being joined together in matrimony. Mr. Merriton is genial, though stately, and has made up his mind to feel satisfied with his daughter's choice; the bride is all blushes and smiles; the bridegroom happy as bridegroom should be. Everard is his brother's best man, and the first to offer his congratulations. Yet he is somewhat quiet and thoughtful, and it is whispered by those who ought to know that he does not intend to remain in New York; but has serious thoughts of transferring all his rights in the property to his brother, and relinquishing all claims to Fairview.

"He was always eccentric," is the general verdict. And this new phase of "Madcap" Everard's eccentricity elicits rather encomium than blame, for Kenneth is popular, and Mr. Merriton's heiress would be a fitting mistress for Fairview.

When the wedding breakfast is over, and the young couple have started on their honeymoon trip, Everard leaves Merriton House, and takes his way toward a far different dwelling—the cottage where Beatrice resided before the marriage, and to which she has returned.

She is standing near the garden gate, a stately lily among the roses, and her heart begins to flutter at his approach; while something resembling her girlhood's brightness lights up her features. They are soon pacing the narrow paths together, with the birds twittering in the leafy tree-tops above their heads, and bright-hued butterflies dancing in the sunshine before them. They are silent, but happy, for hope points to the future, and already old troubles are receding in the distance.

"Darling," says Everard, "how much longer are we to wait?"

Then she frowns, blushes, and smiles, preaching patience, as she has often done before; for she has resolved not to marry again until a year has elapsed after Jerome Maxwell's death.

"Sometimes I fear I am selfish in not giving you up altogether," she says, deprecatingly. "You are sacrificing so much for my sake, and your brother and his wife must always despise me."

"They have forgiven you long ago, dear Beatrice, and regard your unjust thoughts of Kenneth as the fantasy of a bewildered brain. But we will leave him to retain his sovereignty at Fairview, and make our home in some foreign land, where no gossips shall prate over the follies of our youth. Bridget, of course, must not be left behind. That dear old woman has been your truest friend amid all your trials. It is but right she should be partaker of our happiness."

"It seems more bliss than I deserve," she says, humbly, "to look forward to such a future. Oh, Everard, when we begin the new life together, may it be unclouded by one remembrance of the past!"

So let us leave them, happy at last. They had been weak and erring, strong only in their love for one another. If they committed faults, they had paid the penalty. We will not mete out stern justice, nor regret that love victorious obtained its fit reward.

THE END.

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